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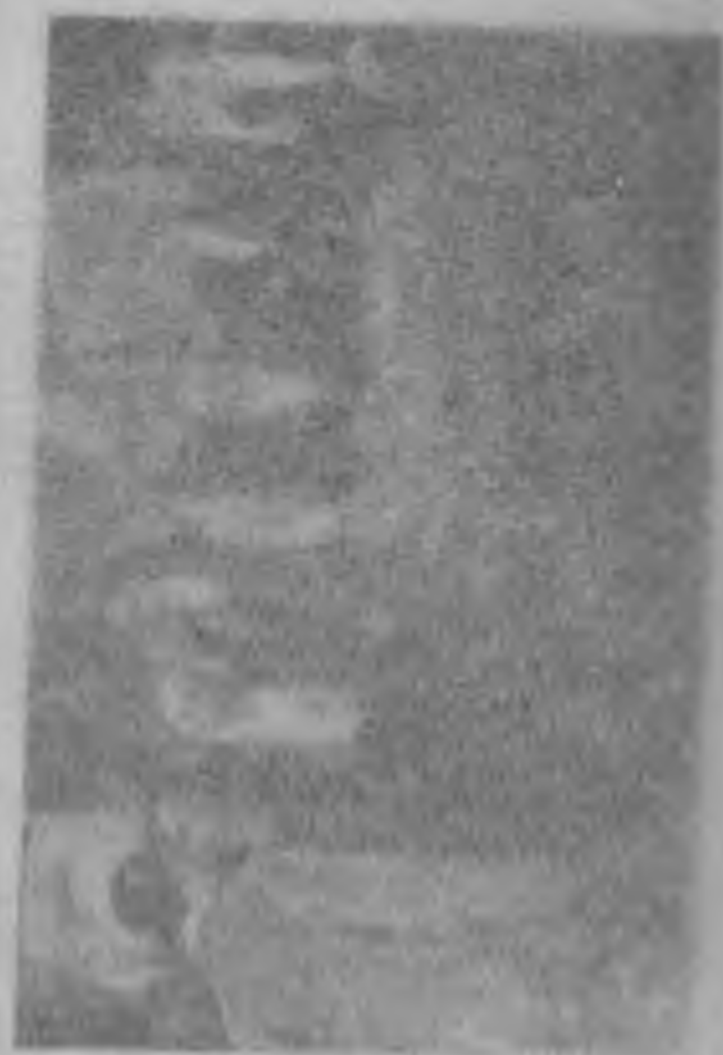
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THE JOURNAL OF THE
ROYAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL INSTITUTE



Edited by
CHARLES DILLINGHAM

G. W. DILLINGHAM & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS NEW YORK



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THE PROFLIGATE

A Novel

BY

ARTHUR HORNBLOW

Author of "The End of the Game,"

"The Lion and the Mouse," etc.

"To Build up the Future, Heaven shatters the Past."

—OWEN MEREDITH.



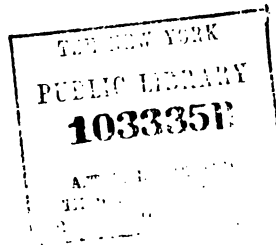
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PUBLISHERS NEW YORK

1908

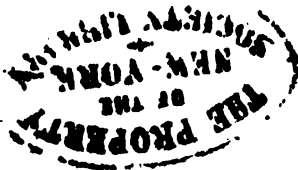
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THE PROFLIGATE

Issued May,



Press of J. J. Little & Ives Co.
425-435 East 24th Street, New York

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The Profligate

Part I

CHAPTER I

"SIGNOR BENTONI."

Leaving her stylish Victoria, with its two prancing bays stamping in the snow at the curb, Miss Norman, muffled in sables, stepped into the elevator at the Van Dyck. She spoke haughtily and tried to look dignified and at ease under the covert scrutiny of the colored attendant, yet in both voice and manner there was an imperceptible shade of embarrassment as if she were conscious that it was not exactly correct for a pretty girl to be making a call unaccompanied in a fashionable studio building.

But Virginia Norman was too clever and too jealous of her good name to permit herself to be caught in any serious *faux pas*. If she were visiting a single man's rooms it was for a purpose that could be shouted from the house tops. Thick veils and feverish secret rendezvous might have a certain fascination between the yellow covers of a French novel, but slander had never

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touched this girl. From the top of the black plumes which crowned her picture hat down to her dainty, patent-leather boots, she was the typical American—independent, high spirited, self reliant.

In any case, her call on Signor Bentoni this December afternoon was in the direct line of duty. It was not her fault if Lily, her married sister, had been obliged to stay home because of callers, and unable to chaperon her. During the three years that she had been studying art she had neglected no opportunity to see good paintings. Signor Bentoni, the portraitist of the 400, before sailing for Europe, was giving a private view, one of those semi-social, self-advertising functions, now a regular feature of the New York season, at which over-dressed, over-perfumed women and idle, insipid men sit around, drinking tea and exchanging scandal, ignoring with unblushing frankness the pictures they profess to have come to see. This particular "view" was of special interest from the fact that the artist-host was the hero of a sensational fracas which had amused the smart set hugely. A millionaire's wife, whose portrait he had painted, saw something to criticise in her waist line, and as she was paying handsomely for the picture, she ventured to find fault. This so enraged the hot-blooded son of Italy that he seized a knife and ripped the canvas from top to bottom. The lady promptly went into hysterics and the affair got into the papers. The publicity that followed more than re-couped the signor for the loss of his angry patroness and naturally created an inordinate demand for cards



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of invitation to his farewell exhibition. Virginia had been anxious to go and was delighted to receive at the eleventh hour a card through her old college chum, Vivie Bryce, who arranged to meet her at the studio.

The elevator stopped with a jerk at the tenth floor, and the girl proceeded along the carpeted corridor, having understood only imperfectly the incoherent directions given her by the attendant. She halted for a moment, bewildered by the puzzling labyrinth, uncertain as to which turn to take. The frosty air of the streets had put a healthy glow in her cheeks, and her furs felt heavy and uncomfortable in the over-heated halls. Suddenly she heard a lumbering step overtaking her.

"Miss Norman! By Jove!" drawled a voice.

The girl turned.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Willets? I'm so glad I've met you. I came to see Signor Bentoni's pictures, but I've lost my way."

"Isn't that jolly—just where I'm going!" spluttered her interlocutor, a stout young man, foppishly dressed, with aggressively rosy cheeks, and a vacuous grin. "It's bally slow at these artistic stunts when one doesn't know a soul, eh what? I'm not much on pictures myself."

Virginia laughed. The idea of Billie Willets knowing something about anything was deliciously droll. He was so ridiculously fat that everyone made fun of him, yet he was a good-natured boy and so pathetically helpless in his stupidity that she was sorry for

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him. Besides, Pip, Toto and Curley liked him and that was a sure open sesame to Virginia's favor. She had met Billie during a visit to Chicago, where his father was a millionaire sausage king. The young man was over-fed and his speech and manners were primeval. He had been sent to New York to acquire Eastern polish, but he proved so brainless at Columbia, where he was known as "Muttonhead," that they gave him up as hopeless. He did only one thing well and that was to squander in fast company the liberal allowances received from home. In the White Light district he was known as a Johnnie with unlimited "dough," and he was popular because of his ability to flash a bank-roll, and his readiness to spend it. He affected the loudest neckties and waistcoats, and as he persisted in having his clothes made too tight and encasing his fat neck in a high collar several sizes too small, he always presented the apoplectic appearance of a young turkey which is being fattened for Thanksgiving.

"Oh, I love pictures!" she chatted on, when she had recovered her composure. "I wouldn't miss this exhibition for anything. I was afraid I couldn't come. Next Tuesday is Christmas, you know. I have a tree to dress for my sister's children. I do it for them every year. Wouldn't you like to come and help? You always amuse the children. You would look stunning as Santa Claus."

Mr. Willets looked glum. It sounded like a doubtful compliment.

"They like me, do they, the little beggars?" he

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replied. Then he asked: "Why don't you take Harry Graham? He'd do anything for you."

"The children think you are too funny for anything," replied Virginia, ignoring the personal thrust. "Do come—we'll have great fun. Miss Bryce is coming too. That will bring you, won't it?" she added with a significant smile.

They arrived at the door of Signor Bentoni's studio, the entrance of which was banked with flowers and draped with Japanese silk portières. Statuary, oriental rugs, rich tapestries, trophies of arms and other art objects also contributed to the æsthetic ornamentation. The rooms were already crowded to suffocation, and it was only with difficulty that Virginia and her stout escort succeeded in forcing a passage through the well dressed throng. All New York was there—that incongruous, ill assorted medley of the rich and the would-be rich, the clever and the would-be clever, the artistic and the pseudo-artistic, which constitutes a metropolitan crowd in public places. There were multi-millionaires, social leaders, actresses, kings of finance, captains of industry, lawyers, notorious divorcées, fashionable authors, critics, artists, and a lot of nobodies who were merely rich. Everyone was inspecting the portraits which, in costly frames, were arranged in double rows around the studio, each pretending to be a connoisseur, and using clumsily technical terms to conceal his ignorance, while Signor Bentoni, a tall, slim man with dark hair, an olive complexion and pointed beard, went from group to group, suave, gallant, modestly deprecating

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with a shrug of his shoulders the stereotyped compliments passed upon his work.

A girl who was chatting with a man in a corner caught sight of Virginia as she and Mr. Willets entered and came rushing up, followed in more leisurely fashion by her companion.

"So you've come at last, Virginia!" she exclaimed with girlish effusiveness. "I was trying to comfort Mr. Graham. He was sure you had eloped with a handsome charmer. You're such a lucky girl—no one ever wanted to run off with me. Isn't it perfectly lovely here? Signor Bentoni is a dear! You look too sweet for anything! Your hat is stunning! It was horrid to keep poor Mr. Graham in such suspense. How do you do, Mr. Willets?"

So Vivie Bryce rattled on, recklessly running one sentence into another, defiant of grammar and punctuation both. She was a vivacious, merry little thing, full of life and laughter, and as bright as a new dollar from the mint. While she had no claim to beauty, her face was so illumined with good nature and intelligence that no one noticed its other shortcomings. It was impossible to be dull in Vivie Bryce's company, and Virginia loved her just because of those qualities which she herself lacked—buoyancy of temperament, a careless, happy disposition that refused to worry, and a never failing supply of drollery. Her mind was entirely free from the thoughts of love and marriage that preoccupy most girls of her age. Chic, charming, provokingly attractive, all the men made love to her, but

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she snapped her fingers at them and saucily proclaimed her independence. The truth was that ambitious projects for the future engrossed her time and energies. Possessing a fine soprano voice, she had been encouraged to study with a view to the operatic stage and decided success had attended her efforts. Despairing, however, of finding an opportunity in America without a reputation made in Europe, she determined to seek fame abroad. Virginia, who was also eager to study art in Paris, had arranged to go with her, and both girls were scarcely able to curb their impatience while awaiting the coming of spring, when they expected to make the journey.

Harry Graham, captain of Columbia's team, a clean cut, broad-shouldered giant with a frank, pleasant face, held out his hand to Miss Norman and gave Billie a careless nod.

"I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting!" smiled Virginia. Putting her gloved hand into the athlete's huge paw, she added: "I haven't seen you to thank you for saving Columbia from disaster at last Saturday's game."

The big fellow beamed. He had been waiting for these words from her. They were sweeter to his ears than all the thunderous applause which had acclaimed his victory on the field, for in spite of his two hundred pounds of muscular masculinity, Harry Graham had weakly succumbed to the irresistible power of a pair of dark eyes.

"You Columbia men," went on Virginia, "are

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always doing something heroic. But for your friend Mr. Willets, I should have lost my way."

"I'm glad Billie's been of use for once in his life," replied Graham dryly. "If I tell them up at college, no one will believe it."

Billie glared at his senior, but prudently refrained from retort. There were reasons why he would rather have avoided Graham that afternoon, and he looked round now for a chance to escape. Virginia, already interested in the pictures, took Vivie by the arm and the two girls were soon some distance away, absorbed in examining the different canvases. Billie was about to follow them when Graham halted him with a vice-like grip on his arm that made the youth wince.

"Where were you yesterday?" demanded the senior sternly. "Why weren't you at ball practice? Skulking as usual, eh? You haven't shown up at lecture for several days either."

Folding his arms across his mighty chest and looking down at Billie in a way that made that youth quail he went on:

"I'll tell you one thing Mr. Billie Willets, and it's the last time I'm going to say it, too. Your unwillingness to put in a reasonable amount of ball practice is making you deuced unpopular with the boys. College will soon be too hot to hold you. One might overlook your shirking your studies. That a fellow can sympathize with. But to wilfully jeopardize athletic reputation of your Alma Mater—that

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pardonable. It's the limit of moral turpitude and degenerate depravity! Besides, there's another reason why you are in particularly bad odor. You associate with gamblers and crooks. Your friendship with that blackguard Bob Forrester is the scandal of the college. You'll be expelled—it's a cinch!"

Billie, red in the face, grew defiant.

"Let them expel. I'm sick of college—studies and football both. I'll write my gov'nor that I'm going to quit. It's waste of time anyhow. I never was much on books. As a highbrow, I'm on the blink, and I'm too fat to run."

His expression was so comically pathetic that Graham kept his face straight only with difficulty.

"Don't be a sillier ass than Nature made you, Billie. The trouble with you is you're lazy. You shirk work. You prefer to play poker with Bob Forrester and his gang. That's how you spent all day yesterday."

The stout youth stammered a feeble denial.

"Don't lie to me!" said Graham in a stern undertone. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. A fellow decently brought up—a college man—to be associating with blacklegs! You were playing poker at Forrester's rooms all day yesterday."

"Well, what if I was? What are you going to do about it?"

"Just this," retorted Graham hotly, "you'll be cut by all of us unless you drop him. When you first came to Columbia I took you up because I had known your pater in Chicago. I introduced you right and left. It

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was through me that you met the Townsends, Miss Norman and the Bryces. If you disgrace yourself you disgrace me. If your skull weren't so thick you'd understand."

"I don't see why you're all down on Forrester. He's of good family and an old Columbia man himself. He seems a decent sort."

Graham was fast losing his temper.

"Billie, you're even a bigger fool than you look, and that's saying a great deal. You've been warned repeatedly about this man Forrester. He was expelled from Columbia, and his own uncle turned him out of doors. That's not saying much for him, is it? He has a rotten reputation. He owes money right and left, besides being a common gambler and associate of crooks to boot. He and his jail-bird friend, Trehern, are a worthy pair. They're only friendly with you for what they can get out of you. How much have they skinned you so far?"

A vacuous expression came over the fat youth's face. He seemed at a loss what to say. Then he blurted out:

"Oh, they play a straight game all right! A fellow can't always win."

"How much have you lost of the \$500 your pater sent you last week?" persisted Graham.

"I guess it's about all gone. I've telegraphed home for more," replied Billie, shamefacedly. Suddenly, it occurred to him that Graham had no right to catechise him, and stiffening up, he said: "Say, isn't it mine to lose? I don't see why you butt in. I'll do what I d—— like."

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Graham shrugged his shoulders and looked at him contemptuously :

“ All right. Do as you like. I wash my hands of you. Associate with Forrester and his gang as much as you like. Maybe you're no better than they are. Birds of a feather flock together, they say. Only from this time on cut me off your visiting list. I'm through with you.”

Turning on his heel Graham rejoined Virginia and Vivie, leaving Billie looking sheepishly after him.

CHAPTER II

THE two girls meantime had kept themselves amused watching the crowd and listening to the scattered fire of small talk. Everybody was discussing everybody else. Graham suggested passing on to see the pictures in the other room, but Vivie refused to move.

"It's more fun hearing them pick each other's reputation to pieces," she said. "Listen!"

Two women at their left were talking about a thin, scrawny woman, with a washed-out face and tired eyes, absurdly over-dressed and bejewelled, who stood a few paces, languidly inspecting a portrait through her lorgnon.

"It's Mrs. Algernon Schakleton!" exclaimed a voice. "She's frightfully rich—that's what makes her look so bored. One sees her everywhere, always in a new gown and loaded down with priceless gems, as if she were a jeweller's show case. She married a man twenty years younger than herself—he took her for her money, of course. They say she's the most miserable woman in New York."

"There's Signor Bentoni talking to that hideous old Mrs. de Trafford," piped someone else on the right. "She got society to take him up. They say she was grateful because he left the warts off her face when he painted her portrait."

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"Gracious, yes!" another woman was saying. "Everybody knows it except her husband, poor man! He kills himself with work downtown while she plays bridge all day and carries on in a scandalous manner. It'll end in the divorce court, of course! The papers will be full of it. Isn't that coloring perfect? Quite a Henner effect."

"Bad pay!" exclaimed a man cynically. "These rich women are always hard up. They live beyond their income, and they spend so much on their dress that they have nothing left for the butcher and baker. I know one society woman who borrows the savings of her domestics. Signor Bentoni was caught recently. He painted the portrait of Mrs. Vanderfeldt, but he had to sue before he got his money."

"Isn't it wonderful?" laughed Virginia, "how well everyone knows everyone else's business?"

"If they would only apply to themselves the rule of conduct they exact in others, the millenium would be here," growled Graham.

Signor Bentoni, having ended his *tête à tête* with Mrs. de Trafford, moved in their direction. He knew Vivie Bryce, having met her one evening after a concert. He stopped to shake hands.

"Buon giorno, signorina, how is it you do? In my ears still I have ze sweetness of your voice! You will be a great artiste—ah, yes—I predict it.

"Nonsense! Signor," laughed Vivie, "don't turn my head, or I'll want to engage you as my Svengali. Let me introduce you to a dear friend of mine—Miss

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Virginia Norman. She paints—only canvas, of course,” she added roguishly. “And this,” pointing to the Columbia man, “is Mr. Graham, known to football fame.”

The signor bowed and showed his white teeth.

“Ver’ glada meet you. My friends ver’ kind. Zey come see my poor pictures.” Shrugging his shoulders he added: “Nothing ver’ good here—not much worth. Zey is in Italy, ze best pictures.” Changing the topic, he asked: “Wher’ is Mr. Bryce—he not come?”

“No,” answered Vivie,” my uncle is a very busy man. He has no time for picture exhibitions.” Dryly she added, “I think he lacks artistic appreciation. He won’t even come to concerts when I sing.”

“These are busy days for lawyers, signor,” chuckled Graham. “It takes all their time to keep their clients out of jail.”

“Yes—yes,” assented the signor, shaking his head—“the strenuous life, is it not? Ze graft, ze frenzied finance!—ver vill it end?”

Billie, who had been skirmishing in Graham’s rear, trying to attract the attention of Miss Bryce, soon succeeded in making Vivie believe that he had something to communicate of a private nature, for, excusing herself, she joined him a short distance away, leaving Virginia and Graham alone with the artist.

“I suppose,” said Virginia, “that you prefer to paint in Italy. You find more inspiration there than in our country. The artistic atmosphere is lacking in America.”

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The signor, who made more money in a week in the United States than he could in Italy in a year, avoided answering directly.

"Italy—ah, yes!—it is ze beautiful country." Then, patronizingly, he added: "But America ver' nice, too—ver' nice."

"Is it not true, signor, that you European artists work more for art's sake than we do. I mean that pecuniary reward with you is only a secondary consideration."

"Ah, yes—only secondary! Art first—money afterwards, is it not?" Then laughingly and again displaying his white teeth, he added, "Money ver' useful, ver' nice, but art, it is first. Money, it is not everything; oh, no!"

He heaved a sigh, as if pained when he thought of the purely commercial instincts of some of his American colleagues.

Virginia was too practical to be imposed upon. The man's a humbug, she thought. No artist would be content to come here year after year merely to paint a lot of hideous old dowagers unless money interested him more than art. A glance quickly exchanged with Graham showed her that he shared her opinion. But the signor was not worrying about what they were thinking of him. His ardent eyes were on Virginia. He noticed that she had a splendid figure, fine dark eyes, perfect coloring. She appealed as strongly to the eye of the artist as to the sensuality of the man. After staring at her for a few moments in a manner that

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brought the color to her cheeks, he said enthusiastically :

“ Ah, you would make ver’ good picture! Your coloring, it is perfection; your hair and eyes, zey are beautiful! I vill paint your portrait, is it not?”

“ You flatter me, signor,” laughed Virginia, with some embarrassment.

“ Ver do you live? Are you a New York girl?” he asked.

“ I’m a New York girl now,” she answered, “ but I’m not a native. I was born in the South.”

“ Ah, ze South!” he cried with enthusiasm. “ Ze beautiful Southern women—zat lovely country! What inspiration for ze artist! Vy did you come here!”

“ I lost my father!” she answered gravely. “ I was left all alone. My mother died when I was a baby. I came to New York to live with my married sister, Mrs. Townsend. I am studying art. Later I expect to go abroad, perhaps to your country.”

“ Vill you sit for a portrait?” he persisted.

“ I can’t promise,” laughed Virginia. “ You see I am very busy. I don’t know what Pip, Toto and Curley would do if I were away so long.”

“ Pip, Toto and Curley!” echoed the signor, puzzled. “ Vot is zat? Dogs?”

“ No,” laughed Virginia. “ They are three of the prettiest golden-haired little children you ever saw—my sister’s children. Those are their pet names. I am going to dress a big Christmas tree for them next Tuesday. Won’t you come? I expect Miss Bryce and her father.”

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"It will be a great honor!" said the signor gallantly.

"We live on Riverside. I'll ask my sister to send you a card," said Virginia, with unaffected cordiality.

The signor bowed low to Virginia, stiffly to Graham, and passed on.

"Isn't he perfectly fascinating," exclaimed Virginia to Vivie, who returned at that moment. "Such charming manners!"

"Fascinating nothing!" growled Graham. "He's a crazy, long-haired dago—that's what he is."

"Oh, you're only jealous because I don't flatter you," retorted Virginia.

Graham relapsed into a sulky silence. Virginia laughed and turned to take a cup of tea, daintily served in delicate Sevres by a pretty little Japanese girl in full native costume.

The studio was more crowded than ever, late comers continuing to push their way in, with more arrivals every minute. It was decidedly the most successful "view" of the season. The pictures were not worth looking at, but everyone was there, and some of the gowns were radiant. The tea and cakes loosened every tongue, and the chatter was deafening.

"Hello!" cried Vivie suddenly, "here comes my uncle with Mr. Forrester."

A distinguished elderly man with snow-white hair and a singularly benevolent face, pushed his way slowly through the throng, accompanied by a professional looking man, some fifteen years his junior. They stopped every few steps to inspect a picture more closely and

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it was not until they almost stumbled over the girls that they were aware of their proximity.

"Who would have expected to see you?" exclaimed Vivie, addressing the younger of the two men. "Good afternoon, Mr. Forrester. I know you are fond of pictures, but it's a new taste for my uncle to have developed." Pointing to Virginia, she added: "You've met Miss Norman at our house."

The old gentleman gave Virginia a courtly bow, and said with a chuckle:

"My friend Bryce and I were passing on our way up town. He has been bothering me all day with dry legal technicalities, so in revenge I dragged him in here. Confess, now, Bryce, that you're bored to death!"

The lawyer smiled as he retorted pleasantly.

"Don't waste time quizzing me. Enjoy your pictures, now you're here. Then we can get through quicker and go home."

Tall, slim, with a pronounced stoop, mentally alert, and keen, restless eyes that took in everything and everybody, Richard Bryce had about him all the earmarks of the shrewd, successful man of the world. No one could mistake his vocation. The honorable profession of the law was written all over his rather aristocratic personality. The firm, clean-shaven mouth, flanked on either side with the traditional mutton-chop whiskers closely trimmed, the nervous, aggressive manner, the rapid, incisive speech—all bespoke the man accustomed to plead before the bar. Fashionably dressed, with an orchid in the button-hole of his well-

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fitting frock coat, he suggested the prosperous professional man. This impression Mr. Bryce wanted to convey. He studied his personal appearance as carefully as an actor studies his "make-up," believing, not without reason, that the world is apt to judge a man, not as he is, but as he looks.

Richard Bryce wished the world to think him successful. He had the national ailment. He was a climber, and his one ambition was to possess great wealth. He had spent his life striving to accumulate riches, and he had not only failed to accomplish this purpose, but he had wrecked his health in the attempt. From his point of view, only one thing in life was worth effort—money. Possession of it meant independence, influence, power. Lack of it meant humiliation, enslavement, obscurity. Consequently, he had little patience with anything not directly connected with material gain. His niece's ambition to win operatic laurels, his friend Forrester's hobby for pictures, he considered foolish expenditures of time and energy.

The lawyer lived with his niece in a somewhat pretentious house uptown. They had not a wide circle of acquaintances for, while Vivie's amiable disposition had gained her many friends, Mr. Bryce himself was not over-popular with his neighbors, owing to a reserved and frigid exterior which repelled rather than attracted people. Yet no one was more universally respected. He was a man of unimpeachable integrity, regular in attendance at church, and punctual and honorable in business dealings. In this respect at

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least no man stood higher in the community. It was a common saying that Richard Bryce's word was as good as his bond.

No one knew much about his early life. He had come to New York from somewhere up the State twenty odd years ago, and it was also known that he was a widower. He never spoke of his wife who, it was understood, had died soon after their marriage. A few years after his arrival in the metropolis a widowed sister who lived in California died, leaving a little girl homeless. Mr. Bryce could not do less than take the orphan and Vivie became a member of his household forthwith.

"This is not art. It's the grossest kind of commercialism, fostered by a coterie of rich and vain old women."

Started on his favorite hobby Mr. Forrester was pointing contemptuously to the pictures about him. "Rembrandt," he went on, "was the greatest of them all. The best portraitists to-day are amateurs by comparison. The life, character and lighting in his portraits are truly wonderful. One imagines the person depicted is actually living in the flesh before you. Take, for instance, his Saskia portrait in the Dresden Gallery, or the Daey portraits in the Amsterdam collection. They are superb in execution and detail. Rembrandt mastered every shade of expression. He modelled the human face not only from the outside, but from the soul as well."

Virginia was interested in what he was saying, but

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she was more interested in studying his face. She had heard much of this sturdy old man, formerly a leading New York merchant, but now retired from active business life. Even before she came from the South she had read about him in the papers as a man of exceptional character, a public spirited philanthropist who never tired of doing good with the fortune accumulated in a long and honorable career. But from Vivie she had also learned of the domestic sorrow that was secretly breaking his heart, his old age embittered by a worthless nephew, whom he had adopted as a child and who had turned out a reckless spendthrift, a common gambler. Scandal after scandal in which Robert Forrester, the nephew, had figured prominently, had filled the newspapers until Forrester, senior, could bear the disgrace no longer. He had banished Robert from his roof, as one kicks out a vicious cur, refusing to have anything further to do with him. But while the cause of the hurt had been removed, the wound remained. One could read in the deep lines with which his face was furrowed, the mental suffering he had undergone.

Mr. Bryce, who had been conversing in an undertone with Vivie, glanced at his watch and turned to interrupt Mr. Forrester, who was still expatiating with enthusiasm on the old masters.

"Friend," he said in precise and deliberate manner, "it's nearly six o'clock. I must go, pictures or no pictures. Are you coming my way?"

"Dear me, Bryce," exclaimed the old gentleman

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with some petulance, "how impatient you are! You're always in such a rush! Take things easy, man. What would you say if I hurried you when you're drafting one of your interminable legal documents?"

"That's business," retorted the lawyer. "This is nonsense. Good afternoon, ladies!"

"Oh, Mr. Bryce," broke in Virginia, "won't you come to the house next Tuesday with Vivie? She is going to help me with our Christmas tree."

After a moment's reflection, Mr. Bryce replied:

"I see nothing to prevent. Yes, I'll come."

As the two gentlemen walked away, Graham remarked:

"The old man's looking pretty bad, isn't he? He feels the disgrace of his cad of a nephew!"

"Yes," said Vivie, "it's slowly killing him. He takes the disgrace terribly to heart."

"It's a bally shame!" exclaimed Graham indignantly.

"Can nothing be done to bring about a reconciliation?" asked Virginia.

"Impossible!" said Vivie emphatically. "You don't know what a dreadful character this Robert Forrester is. He has been going from bad to worse for years. Nobody will have anything to do with him."

"He's a bad 'un, all right," assented Graham, shaking his head, "as far as I know he hasn't a single redeeming quality. He's unprincipled, dissolute, vicious. Only gamblers and sharpers will associate with him."

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"Perhaps he can't help it," mused Virginia. "I believe that we are all good or bad, according to the way we are constituted, not because we deliberately choose to be either."

"What kind of a conundrum is that?" laughed Vivie.

"No, I'm serious," went on Virginia. "The good man or woman, finding no pleasure in evil, can't help being good, and, therefore, deserves no praise, while the bad man or woman, delighting in breaking society's laws, can't help being wicked, and, therefore, is not entirely responsible for his or her actions. All depends on the constituency of the countless minute protoplasmic cells which go to make up our being. A thousand pre-natal influences over which we have absolutely no control, an accident in childhood due to the carelessness of a nurse, may develop vicious instincts, even murderous impulses, in an otherwise healthy and normal brain. The psychological side of this subject has always deeply interested me."

"Your sympathy is wasted in this case, I assure you," chimed in Graham. "The fellow is utterly worthless."

"No man is ever so bad that there is nothing good in him," replied Virginia thoughtfully. "The worst criminals that ever lived had qualities one could admire. Maybe Mr. Forrester's nephew never had the right influences around him."

"No one could ever do anything with him," said Vivie. "Even in his boyhood he was hard to manage."

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"What is he like?" asked Virginia.

"He used to be nice looking before he went to the bad," replied Vivie. "I haven't seen him for years, but I remember him perfectly. He was rather a handsome boy."

"He's tall and dark," said Graham. "I often run across him, but I always avoid him. One might still call him handsome, but late hours and dissipation of all kinds have left him a physical wreck. Oh, there's no hope for him. He's beyond redemption. He'll go down lower and lower until one day he'll land in the gutter. When all his money and credit is gone he'll blow his brains out. Good riddance!"

"How sad!" said Virginia. "Those are the real tragedies—the wretched and wasted careers scattered along life's highway. The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations, runs the stern biblical decree. How unjust, yet how true! Don't we see proof of it every day? This man may be the victim of heredity. For all we know some forgotten ancestor of his was a spendthrift, a drunkard, a gambler. Really, I pity him."

The rooms were rapidly emptying. The exhibition was nearing its close. Vivie rose to go.

"Virginia! You talk like an encyclopædia. You're so clever you make me wuzzy. Come, Mr. Graham, let's go before she starts off on another of her pet theories!"

Virginia laughed heartily, as she arranged her furs.

"It's not so bad as all that!" she said. "I don't

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know why, but the picture you've drawn of that man Forrester has made a singular impression on me. He seems to haunt me. Come, Mr. Graham, my carriage is down stairs. Miss Bryce and I will drive you part of the way home."

CHAPTER III

FOR over a quarter of a century, John Forrester, of the well known dry goods firm of Forrester & Co., had been a commanding figure in the commercial life of the metropolis. From obscure beginnings he had risen to comparative affluence and succeeded in accumulating an estate insignificant as modern fortunes go, but more than enough to permit him to live comfortably in the style which suited him. President of the Chamber of Commerce, director in half a dozen financial institutions, he was known far and wide for his philanthropy. His tastes being simple and his wants few, he found at the end of each year that he had sufficient surplus from his income to make generous gifts to charity. Hospitals and other public institutions were the recipients of his bounty, and it was also his custom at Christmas to give a feast of unlimited turkey and plum pudding to the poor newsboys of the city. On these occasions he would himself address the ragged urchins, talking to them familiarly in their own vernacular, pointing to himself as an example of a destitute boy who had achieved success by his own unaided efforts, inculcating in his youthful listeners the fundamental principles that go to the making of honest men. He loved this kind of thing, not because the newspapers gave his benevolence wide publicity, but because he sincerely believed he might

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be instrumental in saving many a deserving boy from the perils of the streets.

He had never married. His intimate friends hinted at a romance in his early career, a disappointment in some now forgotten love affair, but he himself never alluded to it. He lived in a roomy old house on Second avenue, near Twentieth street, a section of New York highly fashionable some thirty years ago, and about whose venerable time-worn mansions, with their elongated windows, quaint porticos, narrow gardens and air of exclusion and dignity, still clings to-day an atmosphere of faded glories. Mr. Forrester bought the house in the late seventies and had lived in it ever since. Fashion had long taken wings uptown, but he preferred to stay where he was, glad of the calm that followed the exodus of society. He had always been a very reserved man, seeking and making few acquaintances. He belonged to several clubs, but rarely went to them. His evenings were usually spent at home reading, with occasional dissipation in the form of a game of chess or whist with a neighbor. This tranquil solitary existence had gone on for years and would probably have continued until his death but for a singular occurrence which completely revolutionized the Forrester household some years before he moved to his present residence.

Shortly after the merchant had established on a successful footing the firm which now bore his name, he resided in a house in West Twenty-third street. One night about twelve o'clock, at least two hours after he

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and the two women servants had retired, there came a violent peal at the front door bell. Mr. Forrester, supposing that either the house was on fire or that a telegraph boy had arrived with a belated despatch, hastened as far as the head of the stairs, while the maid hurried down to investigate. Mrs. Mallory, the cook, always apprehensive of burglars, leaned nervously over the bannisters. When the door was opened no one was to be seen, but on the door step was a basket covered with a white cloth. The astonished maid carried the burden gingerly into the hall and dropped it on the floor. Mr. Forrester raised the cloth, and fell back in stupefaction. Amidst a mass of dainty laces lay a dimpled, dark-eyed baby. The sudden jolt awoke the sleeping infant who, surprised to see so many astonished faces, smiled up at them and said: "Goo!" The babe was expensively dressed. Around its neck was a chain and gold locket set in diamonds and pinned to its clothing was a scrap of paper bearing these words. *"I am of good parentage. Please be good to me for the sake of my unhappy mother."* Signed with initials "F. B." This was the only clue to the child's identity.

The women were overjoyed, but Mr. Forrester was furious at what he regarded as an ill-timed practical joke. He was angry partly at being disturbed out of his sleep, but chiefly because of the ridiculous position he was placed in. He, of all people, to have a baby foisted on him! He tolerated children of a certain size, but he drew the line at new born infants. He

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could never understand why they howled so persistently, apparently without cause. They got on his nerves and were so fragile that he was afraid they might break in two if he caressed them. So, asserting his authority, he ordered the maid to leave the baby with the housekeeper for the night and take it first thing in the morning to a foundling hospital. But this stern decree met with heated opposition from Mrs. Mallory, who once had a little one of her own. It takes only a few hours for a baby to wind its way round the heart of most women, and when the time came to execute the master's orders the motherly housekeeper vowed amid tears that she would sooner lose her place than surrender to a horrid "pooblick insti-tootion" the sweet baby which heaven had sent them. This unlooked for rebellion put Mr. Forrester in a serious dilemma. Mrs. Mallory was not only a model housekeeper, but she was also an expert *cordon bleu*. Rather, therefore, than jeopardize his toothsome dinners, he agreed to a compromise. The unwelcome little stranger was allowed to remain on the understanding that any caterwauling was to be instantly suppressed, and that the baby should be kept out of sight below stairs.

The incident was soon forgotten and life went on with John Forrester as before, serene and uneventful. Nothing had been heard of the foundling's parents and all efforts to trace them had failed. Absorbed in his own business affairs, the merchant soon forgot the child's very existence, or if he caught an occasional

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glimpse of him playing about the house, he paid no attention. But one day, some seven or eight years later, he had occasion to go into the garden to get something, and he came upon two boys engaged in a desperate fist fight. The smaller boy, whom he recognized as his cook's protégé, was outclassed by his opponent, both in size and science, and was rapidly getting the worst of the encounter. But, undaunted by the severe punishment which he was receiving and although his adversary's heavy blows fell upon his face like hail, he kept rushing bravely to the attack in a plucky way that compelled Mr. Forrester's admiration. The merchant immediately stopped the fight, putting the bully to flight, and began to question the boy who was an absolute stranger to him although so long a member of his household.

"Weren't you afraid he'd hurt you, Robert?" he asked.

"Afraid?" echoed the boy scornfully. "If you hadn't butted in, I'd have thrashed him all right!"

Mr. Forrester saw more of Robert after that, and thought he recognized in the lad the making of a man after his own heart. That he came of no ordinary stock was apparent. Blood seldom lies and not even the fact that the boy virtually had been reared in the kitchen could prevent him carrying himself with hauteur and having by instinct the polish of manner and bearing which comes only of high breeding. About this time something happened which precipitated events. The best of cooks are mortal, like everyone

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else. Mrs. Mallory suddenly died of heart disease and her protégé was once more an orphan. Confronted with the alternative of putting the lad into an institution or adopting him himself, Mr. Forrester chose the latter course and determined to bring him up as his own, so that in his old age he might have a companion and a successor. Yet he recognized the disadvantage to the boy of having mystery or scandal connected with his birth. He decided, therefore, to forget the manner of his coming, to move to another neighborhood, where the child was not known, and to present him to the world as his dead brother's child. The other maid servant having left his service some time before, no obstacle existed to this plan.

Once having taken the decision to adopt the boy, John Forrester did not halt at half measures. He gave Robert the same expensive education and careful training his own son would have had. He sent him to Columbia University and centred all his hopes on him, confidently expecting that one day the young man would succeed him in the firm of Forrester & Co. Nourishing this illusion, many years went by before the merchant realized that he had made the first serious blunder of his life.

Robert was a peculiar boy. Never having had the advantage of a mother's guidance, the unlovable traits in his character had been allowed to develop unchecked. He was a handsome lad, aristocratic looking and tall for his age, but he made few friends. He was unpopular with playmates because of his egotism and his

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vicious temper. He was taciturn, headstrong, cruel, and generally unmanageable. There were strange contradictions in his moral makeup. One day he killed a little kitten from sheer wantonness, appearing to take diabolical delight in watching the poor animal's sufferings. Yet, on another occasion, he attacked unhesitatingly a bully much bigger and stronger than himself, whom he caught tormenting a helpless cripple. At school he was idle and shirked his lessons, so it was not surprising that he left college without honors. His benefactor was disappointed, but still hopeful, arguing that some of the biggest dunces have turned out brilliant business men.

In due time Robert entered the Forrester firm, but it was plain from the start that his heart was not in his work. His fiery, ungovernable spirit chafed under the restraint and discipline of commercial routine. He neglected his duties and absented himself from the office for days at a time, spending his evenings in doubtful company, returning home at ungodly hours. Mr. Forrester, thoroughly disgusted with his conduct, made angry protest, but to no purpose. The young man defied his authority and gradually drifted into a dissolute way of living. He was a reckless spendthrift and always in debt. The liberal allowance he enjoyed was always overdrawn or mortgaged, thanks to Mr. Marks, an accommodating money lender, and when pressed by his creditors he would make fresh demands upon his benefactor until Mr. Forrester was utterly exasperated.

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In his difficulty the merchant sought the advice of his friend Bryce. The two men had formed an acquaintance a few years previously, through some legal business in which Mr. Forrester was involved, and since that time they had become very intimate. Both expert chess players and passionately fond of the game, almost every night found either Mr. Forrester at the Bryce residence or the lawyer at the merchant's home.

"Bryce," exclaimed one evening Mr. Forrester with a gesture of discouragement, "I don't know how to manage that boy Robert. He's got the devil in him!"

Mr. Bryce made no reply. He had never liked the youth, and he knew the feeling was mutual. One day, after some fresh scandal in which the young man was involved, he had ventured to remonstrate with him, pointing out life's many pitfalls and the reckless, dangerous course he was steering. Robert, hot tempered, had impatiently resented the counsel as an unwarranted impertinence. Angry words passed until Mr. Bryce, incensed, had turned on his heel. From that day forth he had washed his hands of his friend's nephew, and it was at his request that Vivie also dropped his acquaintance. She likewise had never been much attracted to the younger Forrester. His tastes, already turned in the direction of high card playing and fast companions, were little in sympathy with her artistic aspirations, and his manner towards all women was singularly blunt and bearish. She was not sorry, therefore, when he took the hint, and stopped his visits at their home.

"I've left him everything I have," went on the old

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man. "Parkes, my former lawyer, drew up my will some years ago. He has it, so if anything happens to me, you will know whom to notify." He was silent for a few minutes and then he continued: "I sometimes think that I'll make a new will. If he doesn't mend his ways I certainly shall do so. I wouldn't rest in my grave if I knew he was squandering the money that it has taken me so many years of hard toil to accumulate. What would you suggest?"

For a moment Mr. Bryce made no reply. He did not seem to have heard, appearing to be entirely absorbed in his own reflections.

"What would you suggest?" repeated the merchant impatiently.

"You must leave your money to someone," answered the lawyer, after a pause. "If not to your nephew, to whom?"

A look of stern determination came over the old man's face. Flushing up, he brought his fist down heavily on the table:

"Rather than know it would be in unworthy hands," he cried, "I'd give it to a hospital. Why, I'd prefer to leave it to you, Bryce!"

From that day on Mr. Bryce took more interest in Mr. Forrester's relations with his nephew.

But Robert gave no sign of reforming. Faster and faster he went the pace until at last the few friends that remained, unwilling to follow him in a course that meant the loss of all self-respect, dropped him one by one. He did not care. He sought new associates and

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was soon on a footing of easy intimacy with the sporting men, gamblers and chemical blondes that go to make up the sinister population of New York's underworld. Freed from all restraint he plunged into extravagances of all kinds, committing every conceivable excess, reckless of the cost, wrecking his health, seeking only to satisfy his abnormal craving for animal enjoyment and sensual pleasure. In the all-night restaurants he was a generous patron, on every race track he was a familiar figure. But all this needed money, and frustrated at getting it at home the young man sought the means of procuring it elsewhere. It was about this time that he made the acquaintance of Creston Trehern.

While well known to the police as a versatile all around crook, Mr. Trehern was not born in the criminal class. By birth he was a gentleman. Breaking the law with him was simply a lamentable weakness. He could not be honest if he honestly tried. His father was a non-conformist minister in Philadelphia and, as often happens with clergymen's sons, his youth was turbulent. Irresistible proclivities for wrong doing ended in every possible scandal until, finally, he went to the bad altogether and stayed there. Repudiated by his family, he came to the metropolis and lived by his wits, engaging in almost every occupation save that which required honest hard work. The police caught him trying to negotiate a quantity of counterfeit money and, confronted with the dismal prospect of a journey up the river, he squealed on his pals to escape punishment.

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Thoroughly scared, he abandoned dangerous criminal operations and became a hanger-on of the cheaper pool-rooms and gambling houses, trying his luck at faro and poker, when he had money to play with, not hesitating to cheat when he got the chance. Soon he saw an opportunity to better his condition. Competition among the big gambling establishments led to the employment of gentlemanly touts who were sent to loiter around the fashionable hotels in order to scrape acquaintance with future victims. Trehern got the job at \$75 a week. If a young millionaire from the West happened to be stopping at the Waldorf someone introduced him to Mr. Creston Trehern. The unsuspecting Westerner did not take the precaution to inquire into the antecedents of Mr. Trehern. He talked well, dressed well, seemed to know everybody and went out of his way to be amiable and obliging. Was it surprising that when one evening after dinner Trehern carelessly suggested a visit to Joe Mansfield's notorious gambling house on West Thirty-seventh street, to which, he added, with a knowing wink, he had the much coveted entrée, the unsophisticated millionaire eagerly swallowed the bait. One drunken kid, member of a prominent multi-millionaire family, was steered by Trehern to Mansfield's in this way and not allowed to depart until he had lost \$200,000, settled in promissory notes, which the family promptly paid to prevent a public scandal.

Robert Forrester was at once attracted to the man. Débonnair, always faultlessly tailored, a glib talker, well acquainted with men and affairs, little wonder

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that to the inexperienced college youth the polished man of the world appeared a fascinating companion whose friendship it was a privilege to possess. In a burst of confidence he imparted his troubles to his new associate, and the obliging Trehern showed the neophyte how, in a great city, it was easy to live by one's wits. He took him to Mansfield's palatial gaming establishment and Forrester made his first stake. He won. For the first time he felt the feverish exhilaration of high play. He won again and then he lost, but the gambling fever gradually grew upon him until it became the one absorbing passion of his life. He could go without eating, go without sleep, but each night saw him seated before the green baize at Mansfield's, winning and losing sums that ran into the thousands. He sacrificed everything—his benefactor's regard, his business career, his social position, for his love of gambling. Faro and the roulette wheel usurped in his heart the place of a mistress.

Gradually he drifted away altogether from decent surroundings and himself became a professional gambler and intimate of blacklegs. He took the rooms he now occupied in the Belvedere, spent his days playing poker, and his nights in the feverish atmosphere of Mansfield's gambling house.

For a time he was successful. Luck seemed to follow him like a shadow. He was soon known as one of the most successful plungers in the White Light district, and while this success lasted there was nothing money could buy that was not his—horses, diamonds,

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fine clothes, expensive living. But it did not last long. He began to lose and then came his first serious trouble. He lost at Mansfield's more than he could pay. He was dishonored, a welcher. In this crisis, he made a last appeal to Mr. Forrester, who gave him his cheque for \$5,000, on his solemn promise never to touch a card again. He gave his word and broke it, and this the merchant never forgave. A complete rupture followed and gradually the merchant banished his profligate nephew altogether from his house and heart. He forbade the young man's name to be mentioned in his presence and finally made up his mind regarding other arrangements as to the disposal of his property. The crisis came when one morning a shabby, wizened old man, with small, cunning eyes like a ferret, appeared at the house on Second avenue and asked to see Mr. Forrester. After submitting a card inscribed "JOSEPH MARKS. MONEY ADVANCED AT REASONABLE RATES" he produced a piece of paper. It was a protested note for \$1,000, signed "Robert Forrester."

"Why do you bring this to me?" demanded the merchant, with rising wrath. "I know nothing of Robert Forrester's affairs."

The money lender shuffled uneasily on his feet and replied:

"I lend your nephew thousand dollars on his expectancies. His note's N. G. I need the money. You won't let an old man lose thousand dollars."

"How did you come to lend \$1,000 to an utterly irresponsible man?" demanded Mr. Forrester angrily.

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"Oh, I know my customers," answered the usurer, with a chuckle in which was cunning and shrewdness both. "If your nephew can't pay to-day he will some day. Isn't he your heir? I don't insist on the money to-day. Oh—no—I can wait. I only want you to say it's all right."

His face white with suppressed rage, Mr. Forrester thundered:

"All right? It isn't 'all right' by any means! You must look to that scamp for your money. He'll never see a cent of mine. The sooner you and your kind understand that the better! Good morning!"

The next time the merchant saw Mr. Bryce he said:

"You're right, Bryce. That scoundrel will never be good for anything. To-morrow I shall draw up a new will."

The lawyer muttered a few stereotyped words of sympathy, but he was not entirely successful in dissimulating a smile of satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

“DON’T let them come in, Lily. The children mustn’t see the tree until it is quite ready and all lit up. Pass me that golden fruit and the Japanese dolls. That’s right! Now the wooden soldiers and the gingerbread Teddy bears! That’s it! There, isn’t it going to look beautiful?”

Virginia stepped back to get a better view of the decorations, while Mrs. Townsend, a tall, stately woman some years her sister’s senior, stood on guard at the door opening on the hall, turning a deaf ear to earnest childish pleadings to be permitted to enter.

The tree, a gigantic pine which soared from the carpet to the ceiling, stood at the far end of the long drawing-room. Each branch fairly groaned under every conceivable object delightful to childish eyes and appetites, from tiny American flags and tin trumpets down to miniature tea sets and variegated sugar sticks, the whole mingled in a dazzling and fascinating confusion of gold and silver tinsel, artificial flowers, Japanese lanterns, and multi-colored candles.

“Let us in—oh, please let us come in!” wailed three shrill little voices outside.

“No—not till we’re ready,” said the mother firmly. “Keep quiet, Toto! Be a good boy, Curley. Aunt Virgie will soon call you. Don’t be impatient, children. Besides, Santa Claus hasn’t arrived yet.”

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This was not strictly true, for Mr. Claus, in the portly person of Mr. Billie Willets, was at that moment sitting on the sofa making sheep's eyes at Vivie Bryce. He looked so ludicrous in his make-up as Father Christmas that the three women had all they could do to control their laughter. On his head he wore a red cap trimmed with white rabbit fur, a patriarchal white beard reached to his waist, while around his waist was a huge belt crammed with toys and bags of candy. His girth was exaggerated by a pillow which the mischievous Vivie had insisted on his stuffing under his tunic, declaring that the children would be disappointed to see Father Christmas without his traditional embonpoint.

But what amused them both was Billie's ludicrous facial expression. His costume and make-up were grotesque, yet he looked as serious as though about to deliver his maiden speech before Congress. In truth, Billie was undergoing a severe ordeal. He felt hot and ill at ease, but with Vivie's critical eyes upon him he dared not complain. In the secret recesses of his heart, he had long nourished a sentimental regard for Miss Bryce, but stood in too much dread of her ready wit to tell her so. He knew she would only laugh at him, and so he said nothing, contenting himself with sending her boxes of candy and giving vent in the beloved one's presence to deep sighs which sounded like muffled explosions. But her slightest request with him was law. Never did slave obey with greater alacrity every whim of a tyrannical master. Virginia had asked

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him to dress up as Santa Claus, and he had demurred. Directly Vivie insisted on it, he capitulated at once, feeling amply repaid for all the inconvenience and discomfort when, on his appearance in the character, she had clapped her hands and said he looked too cute for anything. Thus praised, Billie ventured to view himself in the mirror and what he saw convinced him that Nature intended him for an actor. He had often thought that he might do well on the stage. He was vaguely conscious that he was making an ass of himself, but after all was it not for the children? As long as none of the fellows were present to guy him he did not care. But he felt terribly warm in his heavy costume. He was perspiring so freely that he began to fan himself. Vivie vigorously objected.

"You mustn't do that!" she exclaimed pitilessly. "It would never do for the children to see you. Whoever heard of Santa Claus fanning himself? It would spoil the illusion."

Billie groaned and looked around for sympathy. Virginia and Mrs. Townsend were too busily occupied lighting up the tree to pay attention to his troubles. Then it occurred to him that he and Vivie were alone, secluded from inquisitive ears. The moment was perhaps propitious for acquainting her with the state of his feelings.

"Miss Bryce," he began timidly, "I—I—er—er—"

He stopped, seized by a violent fit of coughing. He grew red in the face and nearly choked. The wool of

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his beard had got into his mouth and half way down his throat. Vivie, alarmed, thumped him on the back. Soon he became more composed and continued:

"As I was saying, Miss Bryce, I would like to——"

Bang! Bang!! Bang!!!

The locked-out children were growing rebellious and six little fists, hammering on the door, demanded instant admittance.

"What a shame to torture the little dears," protested Vivie. "If that's mother-love I'm glad I'm an old maid." Rising and turning to Billie she said: "Come Mr. Claus, get busy. We're wasting time. The children are coming in."

Billie growled, but to no purpose. Vivie seized him and by dint of much pushing and poking in the ribs caused him to take up a classic attitude opposite the door so he might greet the little ones when they entered. She arranged his arms, screwed his head round and threw out his chest as if he were some automaton. He let her do as she liked with him, completely helpless in her hands, and so foolish looking that Virginia and Mrs. Townsend were convulsed with laughter. Vivie herself was so overcome with hilarity that she had to retire to a corner of the room with a handkerchief stuffed into her mouth to conceal her merriment. Only Billie remained sober. Instinctively he knew that he was the cause of the fun, but his stolid expression never changed.

At last Mrs. Townsend announced that all was

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ready. The last candles on the tree were hastily lighted, and Virginia threw open the door crying :

“ To nice little girls and good little boys
Old Santa Claus brings candies and toys.
Clap your hands and dance with glee
And Santa will show you his fairy tree.”

There golden haired children, two little girls dressed in white frocks with big blue sashes, and a chubby boy in a sailor suit, rushed into the room, each tumbling over the other in their haste. The sudden apparition of Billie, standing solemnly before them like a wax work figure, so startled Curley that he burst into tears, but the next moment Virginia had the youngster in her arms consoling him. The little girls, more sophisticated, danced irreverently around Santa Claus, pulling his beard and whooping like Indians.

“ It’s only Papa ! ” declared Toto, with a pout, as though she had been imposed upon.

“ Oh, my ! Come and look at the tree ! ” shouted Pip, a flaxen-haired maiden of six tender summers, standing on tiptoes in a frantic effort to annex a bag of sweets.

“ Oh, isn’t it bee-u-tiful !! ” cried all three in chorus.

The children were silent, gazing at the illuminated tree in open-mouthed wonder, rendered speechless by the glittering spectacle before them, each calculating as to which particular coveted object would fall to his or her share.

Virginia clapped her hands with delight. Her painting and her love for her sister’s children constituted

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all the happiness she looked for in life. She remembered the awe and wonder which had filled her own little soul when her mother carried her in to see her first Christmas tree. That was years ago and what had not happened since! First her mother had been taken, and then her father. Of her mother, who died in her infancy, she had known practically nothing, her elder sister, Lily, who had married a well-to-do New Yorker, she heard from only at rare intervals, but her father, a successful cotton broker of Louisville, had been everything to her. And right proud Mr. Norman was of his handsome daughter who, soon after her début, was one of the most popular society belles in the South. With more than average good looks, a university education, prospects of a comfortable fortune, everything seemed to smile upon Virginia Norman when, without warning, came the blow which checked all her gaieties. For months after his death, she was unconsolable, and long after she had ceased to wear the conventional trappings of mourning she nourished a secret grief in her heart. Left with \$100,000, she had the means to continue living in the style to which she had been accustomed, but realizing that she could not live alone she decided to leave Louisville and accepted her sister's invitation to make her home with them in New York until her plans were more settled. She realized that not only the metropolis would offer her more advantages for studying art, but that in new surroundings she would be reminded less of her sorrow.

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All her friends predicted that she would marry. A girl with good looks, money and a lovable disposition does not lack suitors, and Virginia had had many. Several proposals were so advantageous from the merely worldly point of view that a girl having less character would have accepted. But Virginia was different from most girls. She had formed her own ideal of the man she would marry and not having met him, she was sincere in her often declared intention of remaining single. She was married to her art, she told her sister when Mrs. Townsend had ventured to interest her in some man of her acquaintance. She said it in jest, but there was more truth in it than she herself realized. Like many girls who are not disturbed by the sex call, she was not attracted to men merely because they were men. She demanded more in a man than mere physical attributes. He must be a man whom she might admire mentally and at the same time fear. He must dominate her entirely. His will must be hers. She had nothing but contempt for the husbands she saw around her—poor weak creatures who allowed themselves to be bullied and led in apron strings by their wives. The man she could love must be her master. One day perhaps, she admitted laughingly to her sister, there would come along such a man, who would exert such will power over her that she would be unable to resist him. Such a man she would marry—even though he were a chimney sweep.

Soon after her arrival at the New York home of her sister, a well appointed house on Riverside Drive, she was delighted to receive the call of Vivie Bryce. The

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two girls had been closely associated at college, having many interests and tastes in common, and on leaving Vassar, had agreed to write to each other for the rest of their natural lives. But, as is usually the case with schoolgirl friendships, the distance was too great to keep up the acquaintance, and gradually their correspondence ceased altogether. Virginia was only too glad to renew it. She had envied Vivie's pluck and unflagging good spirits. Such a companion was just what she needed. Thoroughly sympathetic to one another, each girl had an ambition in life, and each promised to help the other to achieve it. Vivie had talked with bated breath of her coming journey to Europe and how she would come back a full-fledged prima donna. Virginia, in turn, had described with enthusiasm the pictures with which she would astonish the art critics.

The children, meantime, were having the time of their lives.

"I want a drum!" cried Curley.

"Please me a doll!" pleaded Toto.

"I'd like a Teddy bear!" said Pip.

"Give me a drum!" roared Curley.

"Yes, Curley, you shall have your drum, but ladies come first. I'm ashamed of you, Curley," said Virginia, pretending to be angry, as she unfastened the prizes from the tree.

Vivie lifted Toto up so she could reach the doll her little heart coveted. Mrs. Townsend performed the same service for Curley.

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"As a special treat," now announced the resourceful Vivie, "all the children shall have a ride round the room on Santa Claus' back. Come, Mr. Willets!"

A wild whoop of delight followed this announcement, followed by a corresponding groan from the docile Billie. The first rush of the children had left him a sorry sight. Half his whiskers were gone, torn out by Curley, who wanted to see if they were real, his fur bonnet was awry and his face streamed with perspiration. His first impulse was to rebel, but catching Vivie's eye, he gallantly nailed his colors to the mast and catching up Toto, placed the flaxen-haired youngster on his shoulders and started to cavort around the room.

"Gee up, horsey!" cried the delighted child, lashing him with her whip.

Suddenly there was an ominous sound, a crack as of rending cloth. Something in Billie's make-up had given way. The next instant steed and rider went sprawling. Happily they landed on a broad divan, so no one was hurt. The children thought it part of the fun and shouted with glee. Vivie and Virginia were hysterical. The uproar was at its height when the folding doors leading to the dining-room opened and Mr. Townsend entered, followed by Mr. Bryce.

"You seem to be enjoying yourselves in here!" exclaimed Mr. Townsend, a big florid man with a hearty manner. "Mr. Bryce and I have been missing the fun, it seems."

Virginia pointed to Billie who, with the assistance of

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Vivie, was trying to repair the damage done to his costume.

"Mr. Willets is so amusing, Phil! I never saw a man work so hard in my life."

"That won't hurt him!" chuckled her brother-in-law. "But where's the rest of your company?" he demanded. "I thought that picture man was coming?"

"Signor Bentoni?" laughed Virginia. "Yes, I expect him every minute. Harry Graham said he was coming, too." Caressing Toto's golden locks, she added: "Directly they arrive we must pack the children off to bed."

"I won't go to bed, Auntie!" cried Toto, stamping her diminutive slippered foot to emphasize her indignation.

"We won't go to bed!" roared Pip and Curley in sympathetic chorus. "Dis is our party; we won't go to bed!"

Pretending to be shocked at this mutinous outbreak, Virginia held up her finger reprovingly.

"Hush! No nice children talk that way. Neither Auntie nor Santa will love you if you are naughty. You'll go to bed because you love Aunt Virginia and to-morrow you can enjoy everything on the tree to your heart's content. Come, we'll see what's on the other side."

Taking Pip and Toto by the hand, Virginia crossed to the other side of the room. Mrs. Townsend, tired after her exertions sank wearily on the sofa near her

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husband and Mr. Bryce, who were finishing their cigars.

"How they enjoy it!" smiled the mother, fondly stroking Curley's head while the youngster was performing a surgical operation on his drum to see what was inside. "It does one's heart good to see them. It's only when one's a child that one knows such complete happiness."

"I don't agree with you," said Mr. Bryce, reflectively. "The happiness of childhood is necessarily incomplete, because the child is too young to understand what constitutes happiness."

"Do we grown-ups know what it is?" demanded Mrs. Townsend. "Is our happiness any more real? What is happiness?"

"Success! Money! Power! If one has these he is happy," declared Mr. Bryce emphatically.

"Yet I know women who have all these, and yet are the most miserable women in the world," objected Mrs. Townsend.

"Then there is some other reason—domestic infelicity perhaps," retorted the lawyer.

"Just so. Then what becomes of your theory?"

"That is another matter. The question of sex is involved there. The truth is, each takes a different view of happiness, according to his tastes. Your friend imagines she would be happy if her husband behaved himself, my niece is sure happiness is awaiting her on the operatic stage, your sister, Miss Virginia, finds happiness in amusing your children, my friend

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Forrester in his pictures, his scapegrace nephew in the excitement of the gambling house. As for me—I see it in material success.”

“You have no reason to complain,” smiled Mrs. Townsend. “You are successful—you stand high in your profession.”

The lawyer shook his head.

“My dear Madame, people are usually mistaken when they estimate the success attained by others. A man may appear wealthy to his neighbor and yet find difficulty in settling with his baker. Take my case. People think I am rich. I am not. I’ve worked hard, my health gave way, my practice suffered. To-day my legal work brings me practically nothing. If it were not for my other interests, I should not be able even to keep up my present modest establishment. That is why I say happiness is impossible without money. My aim is to make money—lots of it. I am now interested in a mining enterprise which I confidently expect will bring me a fortune.”

“What gold brick scheme is that?” asked Mr. Townsend sceptically. “Another of your Wall Street deals? If you want to keep what money you have left, take my advice and avoid Wall Street like the plague!”

Mr. Bryce shrugged his shoulders.

“My dear Townsend, you talk nonsense like everyone else who ventures to give an opinion on matters he knows nothing about. Wall Street is much maligned and generally misunderstood. Instead of being a menace, it is most useful to the community. If it were

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not for the Stock Exchange not a railroad car would move, not a mill wheel would turn, not a furnace would be lighted, all the industries of the country would be at a standstill for lack of capital. Wall Street is dangerous, I admit, for young men or men who lack firmness of character. But to one who makes a careful study of the market and understands how to take advantage of the fluctuations in prices there is a great fortune to be made with comparative little risk."

Delicate wines and an excellent cigar had put Mr. Bryce in a candid frame of mind. What he said was only the truth, but until now he had not been so frank in discussing his affairs. A shrewd and clever lawyer, he had succeeded in building up one of the largest legal practices in the country, and he was rapidly rolling up a fortune when something snapped under the strain. The physicians said it was his heart and advised a less strenuous life. He could not ignore this warning, he permitted younger lawyers to secure the bulk of his business, and gradually his law office dwindled down to a mere shadow of its former importance, entailing necessarily a curtailment in income. This Mr. Bryce regretted more than the lightening of his duties. He had always lived well, in a style befitting a professional man of ample means, and when it became necessary to reduce expenses he was sometimes puzzled how to reconcile expensive tastes with an attenuated bank account. He had tried to increase his income by secretly operating in a small way in Wall Street, and for a time he was so successful that the dangerous stock gambling game took firm hold of him. He

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plunged deeper and deeper in, now realizing considerable profits on successful deals, now losing far more than he could afford, but always managing to conceal from the world that he was in any way interested in the stock market. Even Vivie, who was well aware of her uncle's weakness, was ignorant of the extent or the outcome of his financial ventures. It was only when he was unusually elated or more than usually depressed that she guessed the truth. Mr. Forrester, too, had to be let into the secret, for the day of a panic on 'Change, when the lawyer found himself threatened with absolute ruin unless he could put up more "margins," his old client was the only one to whom he could appeal for help. The assistance was forthcoming, and for a time Mr. Bryce was cured of the ticker fever.

"Virginia told me that she met you at the picture exhibition the other afternoon," said Mrs. Townsend.

"Yes," answered the lawyer, with a grimace. "I don't care for pictures myself, but Mr. Forrester wanted to see them so I went along, too. What progress is your sister making with her painting?"

"Virginia is doing very well indeed," replied Mrs. Townsend. "She works hard and has fully decided to make it her career. She is determined to go abroad to study the masters in the European galleries."

"Bah!" exclaimed the lawyer impatiently. "She'd better stay home. Why doesn't she marry and settle down? She's an attractive looking girl enough and has money. It oughtn't to be difficult to find her a husband."

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"Yes, that's what I say," sighed his hostess. "I would like nothing better than to see her happily settled near me." She was silent a moment, and then she continued, "Oh, Virginia could marry to-morrow if she wished to, but she won't hear of it. Take Harry Graham for instance. He worships the very ground she walks on. He haunts her like a shadow. I'm surprised he is not here already. He is a fine young fellow with brilliant prospects. He would no doubt make her an excellent husband. But Virginia doesn't care for him. She likes him, of course, as any girl would a good looking man who is attentive to her, but love him? No! I don't think she knows what love is. If she does know she is very skilful in concealing her feelings. She's entirely devoted to her painting. I can't get her interested in anything else."

"It's just the same with Vivie," grumbled the lawyer. "Really, I don't know what's come over the girls nowadays. When I was a young fellow their one ambition was to find a husband and rear a family. Now they are indifferent. To many the very idea of motherhood is repellant. They want to be free, to go out into the world and win fame as singers, artists, writers. All I hear from Vivie from morning till night is opera, concerts, singers. She, too, is teasing me to let her go abroad. I suppose I'll have to let her go or she'll give me no peace. I don't like the idea, for she is far from strong."

Mrs. Townsend shook her head.

"Ah, you men are all alike—arguing only from your

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own selfish viewpoint! Why should you have the monopoly of ambition? Girls are no longer willing to remain meekly in the background. The world has progressed. They have advanced with it. In all walks of life they seek to be independent. Some seek employment in factories, shops, offices; others in better circumstances, who have the talent, become artists, singers, journalists, writers. You can't blame them for being fired with ambition to earn their own living. Didn't you say yourself that happiness was material success?"

"For men—yes; for women—no. Women are happiest where Nature intended them to be, occupied in those duties for which in physique and temperament they are best fitted—the fireside or the cradle. Their frailer physique and their mental limitations bar them from successfully competing with men. Of course, you can cite instances where women have succeeded in the professions you mention. They are the exceptions which prove the rule. The battle of life is too fierce for women. Even if they succeed the reward does not compensate for the enormous effort made. If they fail they have neither the moral strength nor the philosophy to bear the disappointment with equanimity. There is nothing substantial in the artistic life—it is all vanity and empty glitter. The stage aspirant rarely finds in it the happiness she sought—only jealousies, coteries, difficulties and injustices of all kinds, and when she realizes the truth, then it is too late to return to the old domestic life."

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"That is true," assented Mrs. Townsend. "I know I am far happier married than I could ever be as a singer, painter or writer—no matter how successful I might be. It is after all largely a matter of temperament. The same rule cannot be applied to all persons. Virginia is never so happy as when seated before her easel all day. I wouldn't have the patience."

The lawyer was about to reply when the door opened, and Mrs. Townsend rose to greet Signor Bentoni.

CHAPTER V

THE artist advanced into the drawing-room with the nonchalant air and easy grace of the polished man of the world. Most men look well in full dress, and Signor Bentoni was a strikingly handsome man. His perfectly fitting coat was as if moulded to him, and his tall, erect figure, bushy black hair, regular features, large dark flashing eyes and Van Dyck beard, made up a striking personality. The signor knew he was handsome, and to a great extent depended upon it for his social success. That his good looks were only skin deep, people found out when they knew him better, but on first acquaintance he made a distinctly favorable impression. Distinguished looking, courtly, amiable, he was generally a favorite, and had no difficulty in securing an entrée to the best houses. His motives, as might be supposed, were not above suspicion. His secret design was to catch a girl with money. Titled foreigners had the pick of America's matrimonial market, returning to Europe laden with bags of gold; he did not see why he should not do the same. To be sure, he had no title with which to bait his hook, but surely his good looks, his reputation as an artist, should count for something. The first time he saw Virginia, at his studio, he was attracted chiefly by her beauty. When he heard that she had \$100,000 in her own right his interest grew, and he had regarded

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this call at the Townsend home on Riverside Drive as an important business engagement.

Serenely unconscious of these matrimonial speculations at her expense, Virginia went quickly forward to welcome him.

"It was so good of you to come, Signor!" she said.

The Italian bent low over her hand and murmured something that heightened the color in her cheeks. Turning to her sister she said:

"Lily—this is Signor Bentoni. My sister—Mrs. Townsend."

The artist bowed and with the ready tact of the born diplomatist, proceeded to make friends with the hostess, going into raptures over the house and neighborhood, praising the pictures and artistic furnishings, flattering her and commending everything she said. Mrs. Townsend thought she had never met a more charming man.

After introducing him to Mr. Townsend and Mr. Bryce, Virginia and Vivie took the signor to inspect the Christmas tree. The children, meantime, had been spirited away, and Billie had fled to change his clothes.

"Isn't it pretty?" said Vivie.

"Most beautiful!" replied the artist, his ardent eyes on Virginia, taking in every detail of her face and figure.

"I didn't mean Virginia!" protested Vivie playfully.

"I meant the tree."

Virginia blushed, and the signor laughed.

"Ze tree, of course! It is beautiful. Both are beautiful!"

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Ignoring the rather clumsy compliment, Virginia continued:

"I think I'd like to paint a picture of a Christmas tree surrounded by a group of happy, dimpled children."

"With you in ze centre of the composition as ze good angel, is it not?" exclaimed Signor Bentoni enthusiastically.

Vivie laughed mockingly.

"And a halo around her sainted head, eh? Oh, Virginia, how popular you are with the men! No one says such nice things to me!"

"Signor Bentoni is only making fun of me," laughed Virginia. "He does not mean a word he says. All foreigners are born flatterers."

Rather annoyed at the persistent personal tone in the artist's remarks, Virginia left him with Vivie and went to greet Harry Graham, who had just come in.

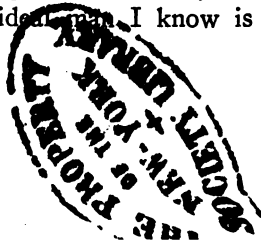
Mr. Townsend crossed over to where Mr. Bryce was sitting.

"It's young Graham," he exclaimed in an undertone. "He comes almost every night—sweet on Virginia."

"So I understand," replied the lawyer. "Too bad you can't make a match of it."

"Oh, he's wasting his time. Virginia's a practical girl. I don't believe there's a man alive who could induce her to marry him. She's seeking for the ideal."

"Then I guess she'll remain single" was the lawyer's laconic rejoinder. "The only ideal man I know is



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John Forrester, and he's old enough to be her grandfather."

"Talking of Mr. Forrester," interrupted his host, "I caught sight of him yesterday on the street. He's not looking well."

"Little wonder!" replied Mr. Bryce, puffing at his cigar. "He's got worry enough to kill any ordinary man."

"That scamp of a nephew again, eh?" said Mr. Townsend.

"Yes, it's been a great blow to him. He was at my office all this afternoon."

"At your office, eh?" echoed Townsend inquiringly. "What can he want with lawyers at his age?"

Mr. Bryce glanced across the room where Vivie was conversing with Signor Bentoni and replied in an undertone:

"It isn't exactly professional for an attorney to gossip about his client's affairs, but there is no secret about this. In fact, I think the sooner it is generally known the better Mr. Forrester will like it. He came down town to see me about drawing up a new will."

"Ah," ejaculated Mr. Townsend, "I see—the nephew!"

"Exactly," said the lawyer, "Mr. Forrester's patience is exhausted. Things have gone from bad to worse. Matters reached a climax the other day when a usurer named Marks brought the old gentleman a protested note for \$1,000. The money it seems had been advanced to the nephew on the strength of his relationship

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to Mr. Forrester. When the money fell due he gave Marks a worthless cheque, and the man Marks made a demand for the money upon Mr. Forrester. You can imagine the rest. Forrester had his servants throw the man out of the house, and he telephoned to me that he was coming down to see me about a new will."

"And the will?" inquired Mr. Townsend interested.

"Cuts Robert Forrester off with a pittance. Instead of being heir to \$200,000 he will barely receive enough to keep him from starvation. Serves him right."

"Certainly, he deserves little sympathy," rejoined Mr. Townsend. "He has run the old gentleman a pretty dance all these years."

"Sympathy!" ejaculated the lawyer, "Why, hanging is too good for him! He'll come to a bad end—that Robert. You mark my word!"

"Who'll get the money?" inquired Mr. Townsend.

Mr. Bryce frowned. Things had not gone exactly to his liking, but the will was not yet signed, and he still entertained hopes.

"Every cent goes to a hospital, unless Mr. Forrester changes his mind between now and to-morrow night. It is to be ready for him to sign to-morrow night."

"Phew!" exclaimed Mr. Townsend rising. "Master Robert's escapades have cost him dear." Taking the lawyer by the arm he said, "Come, let's go into the dining-room and have something to drink."

Mrs. Townsend had gone upstairs to see after the children. Vivie was chatting at the rate of a mile a minute with Signor Bentoni, bombarding him with all

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kinds of questions about the difficulties and opportunities of the artistic life abroad. Virginia was entertaining Harry Graham with an account of Billie's impersonation of Santa Claus, and he was helping her extinguish the now almost consumed candles on the tree when the fat youth suddenly made his re-appearance, in a dress suit this time, but still having on his face some traces of his recent "make-up." He started on seeing Graham and was hurriedly crossing the room when the athlete intercepted him.

"I missed a treat, I hear!" said Graham with mock indignation. "Didn't Nature make you ridiculous enough?"

Billie grew red and shuffled uneasily on his feet. Virginia came to the rescue.

"He did it to please me," she said. "It was to amuse the children."

"The lady pleads your cause so I won't kill you this time," said Graham good humoredly. Then sternly, he demanded: "Do you know what to-morrow is?"

"To-morrow?" stammered Billie. "What is to-morrow?"

"Wednesday," replied Graham with emphasis. "To-morrow's Wednesday—ball practice day. Are you coming? It's your last chance to redeem yourself."

"To-morrow! I can't. Really, I can't. I'm engaged."

"Engaged, eh?" replied Graham savagely. "More poker playing with Bob Forrester, I wager."

"Well—what of it?" demanded Billie, getting angry."

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"When are you going to stop butting into my affairs. I'll do what I like—do you hear!"

With which proclamation of independence, the boldness of which astonished himself, Billie joined Vivie and Signor Bentoni.

Virginia sat down on the sofa, and Graham took a seat beside her.

"Why are you so severe with Mr. Willets?" she asked. "He's so good natured!"

"Because he's a fool. It's too bad."

"What's too bad?"

"That Billie should be allowed to go to the dogs. He's going to gamble again to-morrow with that blackguard Robert Forrester, after I've warned him repeatedly against the man."

"Forrester—Forrester!" exclaimed Virginia "Everyone talks against this Robert Forrester. Really it makes me curious to see him. A man of whom one hears so much bad must be interesting."

Graham looked at her wonderingly.

"You don't mean that," he said. "How can a good woman like you endorse anyone who is notoriously vicious, immoral—utterly depraved?"

"None of us is faultless," answered Virginia gently. "You say the man is vicious—thoroughly bad. Circumstances may have made him so. There must be some good in him. It would be interesting to take such a man and try to reform him. The harder the task, the more credit one would deserve. The influence of one

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good woman might change his whole character. Who knows? It would be an interesting experiment."

Graham laughed cynically.

"She would waste her time, I assure you."

"I don't know," said Virginia musingly. "I should like to try."

Graham bent forward until his face almost touched hers.

"There are other men more deserving of your interest," he said significantly.

He looked at her longingly, not daring to speak the words that were on his lips. Virginia saw the necessity of changing the topic.

"What do you think of the tree?" she asked with an aggrieved air. "You haven't said a word about it, and Vivie and I worked ever so hard."

"I did not come here to-night to see the tree," he replied impatiently. "I came to see you. I have waited a long time for this chance. I have something to say to you."

Virginia guessed intuitively that it was something she did not care to hear, and hastily she tried to lead the conversation into less dangerous channels. With affected carelessness she asked:

"Have you been to the Art League Exhibition yet? Some of the pictures are well worth seeing. There is a sunset by Stewart which is a marvel of coloring. I only hope that one day I shall be able to paint as well as that."

Graham did not answer. After having summoned

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up courage to speak, he was not to be put off by idle gossip about pictures. Edging nearer, he said huskily:

"Miss Norman—Virginia—I can't beat about the bush any longer. Can't you guess what it is I find so hard to say? I'm a poor hand at phrase making. It's only this—I love you, Virginia. I've loved you ever since I first met you at that ball game. I want you to be my wife."

The girl flushed, and there was an awkward pause. Then she said gravely:

"I'm sorry you told me this."

"Why?" he demanded anxiously.

"Because I like you, and I fear our friendship may suffer."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You have made it impossible for us to continue chums as we have been," she answered. "I had no idea you thought of me in that way. I appreciate the honor you do me, but I can never be your wife, Mr. Graham. You see I am quite frank. It is best that we understand each other from the start."

"There is some other man," he said boldly.

She shook her head and replied gently:

"There is no other man. I may even admit that I like you better than any other man I know.

"Then why——?" he ejaculated.

"There are two reasons," she replied. "First, I do not love you. I like you—as a friend, but I know it is not the feeling a woman should have for the man she is going to call her husband. Secondly, I do not

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wish to marry—at any rate for some years to come. My painting takes all my time. I love my work. I am ambitious to accomplish something. I don't wish anything to interfere with my ambition."

Graham was silent. He looked so dejected that Virginia felt sorry for him. Extending her hand, she said:

"We can still remain good friends if you are willing to abide by the conditions. I like you too well to lose you altogether. Why can't we enter into an alliance of good comradeship? What do you say?"

She spoke calmly, her dark eyes looking frankly into his, arguing as with a big, unruly brother. The tranquil expression on her face, the dispassionate tone of her voice told him better than her words that his cause was a hopeless one. This woman, he felt, was not capable of sexual disturbance, or if she was, he was not the man who could arouse it. He knew that he was defeated, yet never had she seemed so desirable.

"What do you say?" she asked again. "Shall we be friends?"

"Yes," he murmured, "I agree."

At that moment Vivie ran to them flushed with excitement, holding a small envelope in her hands.

"Look, Virginia, what Signor Bentoni has given us! A box for to-morrow night's performance of 'Faust' at the opera. Isn't he a darling?"

The signor showed his white teeth and looked inquiringly at Virginia.

"It is nothing. I can have a box at ze opera any time for ze asking. It gives me great pleasure."

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"Oh, that is nice," smiled Virginia, pleased more for Vivie's sake than for herself. She knew what a treat it meant for her. "Won't you join us there, Signor?" she asked.

"I shall be delighted," replied the artist, with a ceremonious bow.

"You'll come, too, won't you?" said Virginia, turning to Graham. "It's part of our bargain," she whispered with a smile.

The signor saw the smile and scowled.

CHAPTER VI

BROADWAY—New York's famous road to perdition, the longest, ugliest, most cosmopolitan thoroughfare in the world! Starting from old Bowling Green where, in other days, lusty forbears held solemn pow-wows with crafty Indian foemen, it wriggles its erratic course diagonally through the big town, sweeping past Central Park, where green swards and shady trees invite the weary to rest, fifteen miles north to Harlem, up the historic heights where Washington made his memorable stand against Cornwallis, to its terminal at Spuyten Duyvil Creek, the end of Manhattan Island. Broadway—the main artery of the American metropolis, at its lower end a deep canyon flanked on either side by precipitous office buildings soaring to appalling heights, shutting out God's sunlight and dwarfing the hurrying pedestrians below till they seem a race of grovelling pigmies. Dense crowds, mostly men, swarm the sidewalks, each shoving and elbowing his fellow, all hastening along in frantic haste as if bent on business of life and death, now darting across the road filled to the curb with moving vehicles of every description, dodging with amazing agility the deadly electric juggernauts that claim fresh victims hourly, running in and out of swift elevators which whirl them in a trice fifty stories high, the great highway a swirling flood of pushing, jostling, nervous

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humanity, each side street vomiting its thousands as streams feed a swollen river, amid the deafening roar of the city's tremendous traffic, the curses of blasphemous drivers, the clanging of car gongs, the shrieking of whistles, the hoarse cries of newspaper vendors making capital of calamity and disaster. Wall Street and the Stock Exchange the storm centre, the stronghold of frenzied financiers protected by the famous "dead line," beyond which no small thief may pass—merchants, brokers, bankers, with white, set faces, rushing here and there, in feverish haste, slaves to the insensate frenzy of a few brief business hours, all in mad pursuit of one thing—money—careless of manners or morals, mocking justice, defying the law, the strong trampling the weak, the rich robbing the poor, stooping to fraud, deceit and every contemptible meanness to secure the gold which their master—the American woman—exacts as tribute, the din and turmoil of nerve-racking business life vibrating in vivid contrast with the peaceful indifference of old Trinity, with its hoary tombstones and sweet chimes, a relic of less strenuous days. Then uptown where handsome shops are stocked with costliest merchandise of the world's marts, past the monstrous "flatiron" that stems the tide at Fifth Avenue and Madison Square, and so on to the Rialto, where the players strut their brief hour on the stage in half a hundred splendid theatres. Upper Broadway—less strenuous and more on pleasure bent, with its white gloved traffic squad, its colossal drygoods emporiums, its towering hotels, its fashionable restaur-

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ants, and all sorts and conditions of men and women—well-dressed shoppers, leisurely promenaders, smart automobiles, seedy thespians, square-jawed gamblers, yellow-haired chorus girls—through the wicked Tenderloin, with its vile gin shops and tawdry dance halls, the hunting ground of the bunco steerer and the harlot, where the unsophisticated stranger is artfully separated from his bank roll, and tender innocence lured to destruction in the dazzle and glare of the gay White Way which never sleeps, ablaze from dusk to dawn with a myriad flashing electric signs, the peaceful hours of the night disturbed by noisy revellers, coming from nocturnal orgies in expensive resorts where champagne corks fly and men and women go the pace that kills.

Mr. Marks, having braved the perils of the Thirty-fourth street crossing, and narrowly escaped being run down by a news wagon driven at preposterous speed, stood breathless at the corner of the busy square looking around for the Belvedere. He was a curious little old man in his long and greasy frock coat and untrimmed beard, and seemed strangely out of place on upper Broadway. By his uncertain, anxious air, one might guess that he was in an unfamiliar neighborhood. For a moment he stood irresolute, bewildered by the crash of the overhead trains and the rush of traffic that nearly swept him off his feet; then accosting a stalwart policeman he asked to be directed to the Belvedere. The officer eyed him dubiously, his suspicions aroused that a person of his appearance could have legitimate business in an expensive apartment house, but with a

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lordly jerk of his thumb he pointed to a lofty building close by, and mumbling his thanks Mr. Marks hastened to the front entrance and addressed the clerk at the desk:

"Does Mr. Forrester live here—Mr. Robert Forrester?"

"Twelfth floor—No. 986—take the elevator," snapped the man without even looking up from his ledger.

Mr. Marks proceeded upstairs, and on reaching the floor he wanted made his way along the narrow halls looking for number 986.

The Belvedere, catering to bachelors only, was one of those Eveless Edens where men who had escaped the yoke of matrimony or experimented with Hymen only to regret it, sought refuge from further blandishments and wiles of the sex. Here all classes of professional men, artists, lawyers, actors, musicians, journalists, could live the life they liked, free from all restrictions. That woman had nothing to do with the domestic economy was evident from the appearance of the place. The refining feminine influence being absent the atmosphere of the entire house was distinctly Bohemian and go-as-you-please. The elevator boys smoked cigarettes, the hall carpets were not on speaking terms with the broom, the wall papers were torn and grimy. There were queer and unorthodox sounds. From one apartment came the twanging of a banjo, from another the popping of champagne corks to the accompaniment of hilarious laughter, on the

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floor above the monotonous banging of a tin-pan piano competed in noise-making with the discordant scraping of a violin.

Mr. Marks was reading the numbers on the doors, trying to find No. 986, when suddenly a door on his right opened and out dashed a man scantily clad in a Roman tunic. He brandished a short sword and uttered guttural cries. The visitor fell back in alarm, while the Roman gladiator, not less startled and no little embarrassed, eyed the stranger sternly! It then dawned upon Mr. Marks that the man was a play-actor rehearsing a role. Suavely, he asked where he might find the apartment of Mr. Robert Forrester.

"Forrester? Oh, yes, I see!" said the thespian in a tone suggesting that he divined his interlocutor's errand. Pointing with his weapon to a door at the far end of the corridor, he said, "I guess you'll find him in there, playing poker as usual with some of his cronies." With a grimace, he added: "You'd better knock before you go in, for he's a bit of a tartar."

Mr. Marks continued along the corridor until he came to the door indicated. He knocked, but received no response, although he could hear people talking loudly, as if in dispute. He knocked again more vigorously.

"Come in!" shouted a voice. "Right this way!"

The old man pushed open the door and followed the private hall until he came to a large parlor with two windows overlooking Broadway. The room was so full of tobacco smoke that at first the visitor could see nothing. His experienced eye was quick to note,

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however, that the place was well, even expensively, furnished. The oriental rugs were rich in coloring, the furniture was massive, the draperies artistic and harmonious. On the walls were hung some fine etchings and engravings. In a corner stood a bronze figure of considerable value, and suspended from the centre of the ceiling was a superb electrolier of Turkish design. Filling up the entire side of one wall was a bookcase well filled with tomes. There was nothing cheap about anything in the room. No matter what the morals of Mr. Robert Forrester might be, there could be no question as to his taste. Yet the place was in such disorder that it looked like a junk shop. Although late in the afternoon the bed was still unmade, and the rest of the room was in the same chaotic condition. Dust an inch thick lay on the draperies and furniture, a chair was broken here, a vase overturned there. Whiskey decanters, empty beer bottles, unwashed glasses littered the side tables and mantel. The carpet was strewn with cigar ends and poker chips.

As Mr. Marks entered the room the voices were raised still louder.

"I called for three cards!" cried a man angrily.

"You asked for two!" retorted another.

"You're a liar!"

There was a crash of chairs falling as the two men sprang forward with clenched fists. The noise of the scuffle prevented Mr. Marks from being heard, so for a moment he stood still, a silent spectator of the fray.

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Three men in their shirt sleeves were playing poker at a small table near the window. A bottle of whiskey had been upset in the mêlée, its precious contents spilling out on the rug. Billie Willets, already stupefied from liquor, was on his feet confronting with a stupid leer a man considerably his senior, whose face was livid with rage.

"You young whelp!" Call me a liar again and I'll throw you out of that window."

The third man sat in sullen silence, taking no side in the quarrel. A cigarette between his teeth and mechanically shuffling the pack of cards, he was staring fixedly before him, lost in thought. Then, as if suddenly realizing that the afternoon was quickly passing and precious moments were being wasted, he brought his fist down on the table and addressing the elder disputant exclaimed with an oath:

"Oh, chuck that scrapping, Trehern! This is a hell of a game! Can't you see the kid's drunk?" Pulling Willets down in his chair, he added: "Sit down, Billie, or I'll throttle you!"

Trehern, still flushed and angry, seemed inclined to continue hostilities, but there was a gleam in his host's eye that he did not like, so sulkily he resumed his seat grumbling.

"That kid's too d—d fresh, Bob! The next time he calls me a liar I'll——"

"Enough!" thundered the other. "Another word and I cash in and quit."

This threat had immediate effect, and the game proceeded in silence.

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The man addressed as Bob dealt a fresh hand with the celerity and accuracy that come of long practice. From the authority of his tone and the readiness with which he was obeyed, it was evident that he was accustomed to have his orders respected, and that he could, if necessary, enforce them. It was difficult to determine his exact age from a casual glance. He was a young man with an old face, the kind of face one sees in big cities, in those resorts where the pace is swift. While the features were regular and also youthful, the expression was set and stern, and the hard lines about his mouth suggested will power that had to be reckoned with. His hair, brushed carelessly back from a high brow, and streaked here and there with gray, was extraordinarily dark, almost a jet black, and contrasting with his extreme pallor, gave his face the appearance of old ivory. In the half light of the afternoon he resembled one of Velasquez' portraits of the gentlemanly adventurers of the sixteenth century. His eyes were large and dark and every now and again blazed with latent fires, as his interest or wrath were aroused, but in repose they looked fatigued and drawn. It was the face of a man who had lived many lives in one, the wreck of a face once handsome, but now seamed with indelible traces of dissipation and reckless living. Pale, haggard, his face bearing witness to years of all-night gambling, and other nerve-exhausting occupations, Robert Forrester, who was barely thirty, looked like a man of forty.

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Mr. Marks thought it high time he attracted attention, so he coughed. Forrester looked up, and recognizing an unwelcome visitor, he half rose from his chair as if to prevent him coming further into the room. As he moved, he accidentally trod on a bull terrier which lay curled up asleep at his feet. The poor animal, thus roughly aroused from its slumbers, yelped with pain, and his master, irritated as much at the noise as at the sudden appearance of a man he would rather not see, and ready to vent his wrath on the first object within reach, gave the unoffending dog a vicious kick that sent him flying to the other side of the room. Then turning savagely on Mr. Marks, he exclaimed:

"How the devil did you get in here? So it was you at the door?" Resuming his seat he muttered to his companions, "I thought it was Armstrong come for a game. It's only Marks—dunning for money. Can anyone open the pot?"

"I open it for five dollars," cried Billie, throwing in a blue chip.

"Make it twenty," said Trehern, a sharp-featured man, rather over-dressed, with a conspicuous necktie and much jewelry.

Forrester, too, went in, after glancing at his cards; then taking up the pack he turned to Billie. "How many?"

"One's enough for me," grinned Billie. The youth from Chicago had been winning all afternoon, and he was jubilant that he, a mere tyro at the game, should

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be taking the money from the two veterans against whom he was pitted, and who he knew only too well were after his blood.

"I like mine," said Trehern quietly.

"Dealer takes one," announced Forrester. As he laid aside the deck he noticed Mr. Marks, who was still standing near the table, taking in the scene. Turning on him furiously he shouted:

"You still here? I'm too busy to see you now. Can't you see that I'm busy?"

The money lender fumbled in his pocket and drew out a bit of paper which had once been white, but now was soiled and creased.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Mr. Robert," he stammered, "but I must see you at once about this."

"Go to h—ll!" cried Forrester angrily. Turning his back on the old man, he added, "I can't talk to you now. I'll see you some other time."

But having travelled to Broadway all the way from Delancey street, Mr. Marks was not to be put off so easily. Flourishing the scrap of paper, he cried:

"You must, Mr. Robert, you must. There's trouble over this. Your note——"

Forrester was paying no attention. Seized once more by the gambling fever, he was entirely absorbed in the study of his cards.

Billie snickered, twisting his vertebræ to give the intruder a friendly nod. Mr. Marks, who lent money to the deserving impecunious at the reasonable interest of fifty per cent. per annum, was too useful a member

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of society to be snubbed. Also, the idea of their host being dunned while he was in the act of drawing to a four-flush struck him as decidedly humorous.

"Say, Forrester," he cried gaily, "why not let Marks be your mascot? He's got the devil's own luck. You'll win enough to pay him off, see if you don't. Great idea—what?"

Treher scowled and fumed at the delay. Like most professional gamblers who sit in a game for what profit they can make out of it, he resented these constant interruptions.

"Are we playing poker or is this a young ladies' tea party?" he growled.

"Five dollars is bet," smiled Billie affably.

"I raise it twenty," said Treher, who was laying in wait for him.

Forrester noted Billie's look of confidence and Treher's raise, and had he been a less experienced player he, too, would have given some outward sign of satisfaction. Not a muscle of his face moved, although he was sure he held the winning hand. He had gone in with two aces and a pair of tens, and he had drawn another ace. With an ace full, and his opponents with good hands against him, he was likely to get away with a fair sized pot. He felt like smiling, because he needed the money. His luck had turned at a critical moment. They were playing an unlimited game, and the few hundred dollars that he might win that afternoon meant everything to him just now. With returning good humor he patted the head of Spot, his faithful little terrier who, dog-like, was licking the hand of the

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master who a moment before had rewarded its devotion by kicking it across the floor.

"Oh, let's make a pot of it," said Forrester grimly as he threw in a handful of chips. "It'll cost you fifty dollars to play, Billie."

Billie promptly raised it to \$75 and Trehern dropped, judging rightly that his flush was no good. The battle was between Forrester and the kid. Forrester paused. He did not like Billie re-raising after a pat hand had been raised. If a good player had done it, he would simply "call" him. But Billie was not a good player. He easily got rattled, and as he was playing in luck he was just as likely as not to think a "king full" the biggest thing going. Forrester wanted to swell the pot several times before scooping it in, and for this reason he took chances and went back at the fat youth.

"A hundred better, Billie," he said soothingly.

But Billie needed no sympathy.

"I'm sorry, Robert, old boy, but I'll have to raise you again," he said banteringly.

"Once more!" retorted Forrester as calm as if they were merely playing for buttons, as he threw his chips on the fast increasing pile.

Billie was perplexed. Forrester was too old a gambler to bet this way unless he had something. He studied his opponent's face trying to read there what the backs of his cards concealed, but he might as well have tried to fathom the Sphinx. It might be a bluff. Well, he could play that kind of a game, too. Quickly, he threw in a handful of yellows.

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"You can't bluff me, Mr. Robert Forrester. I've a hand here that's worth good money. Suppose I set the pace? I raise you a hundred dollars!"

Trehern pushed aside his whiskey glass and took a keener interest in the game. There was going to be some fun. Of course, the "kid" was beaten. Even Mr. Marks, forgotten by the others, in the excitement, pressed forward to see.

"A hundred better than you!" said Forrester calmly. He threw into the pot his last remaining hundred dollars worth of chips, then taking a roll of bills from his pocket peeled off two fifties and placed them on the pile in the centre of the table. There was now \$800 in the pot. Mr. Marks gasped and Trehern's mouth watered.

Billie was flushed and nervous. Forrester bent over the table, waiting for his opponent's next move, his face expressionless as a mask. Only a twitching of his hands betrayed the strain under which he was laboring.

"Two hundred better than you!" cried Billie excitedly, producing a fat wad of bills and throwing the money on the table. Under the influence of more whiskey than was good for him he was losing his *sang froid* and betting recklessly.

"It's Bob's money all right!" muttered Trehern almost audibly.

Forrester hesitated for a moment. Experienced gambler as he was, accustomed as he was to losing and winning large sums of money, the play of this youngster puzzled him. He must have made "fours."

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He couldn't conceive of anyone outside of a lunatic asylum betting in that fashion unless he had. Hardened as he was to ordinary human emotions, a chill ran down his spine as he thought of this possibility. All the money he had in the world was now in the centre of the table. If he lost he would be completely wiped out. It would be the climax of a run of hard luck, which in a few months had left him almost penniless, after a fortune won at the gaming tables. Well, there was no help for it. He still believed Billie was bluffing. He must call him anyhow. Rapidly he counted the few remaining bills he had left—\$150.

"I call your bluff, Billie," he said laconically. "Let's see what you've got. Mine's a full. I guess the pot's mine."

He threw down his hand and was starting to gather in the pile of chips and money when Billie, flushed with a combination of whiskey and excitement, threw himself prostrate over the table and made a quick grab for the money.

"Hold on!" he shouted. "Your full ain't no good!" Billie had no respect for grammar when playing poker. "I have four deuces!"

"Phew!" ejaculated Trehern, with a significant whistle.

Forrester said nothing. His impassive face turned a trifle whiter, and his thin lips were more tightly compressed, but he was silent. The cards had spoken, and he was too much of the gambler to quarrel with their verdict. The thoroughbred does not whimper

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when he loses. It's part of the game and part of his pride to receive with a contemptuous smile the blow that knocks him out. He rose from the table with a yawn, while Billie, noisily elated with his success, counted his winnings amid outbursts of maudlin laughter.

As Forrester moved away he nearly stumbled over Mr. Marks, who had stood there, a fascinated spectator of the game. The sight of the usurer, whose presence he had forgotten, aroused the gambler to a fury. Turning on him with an oath he burst out:

"You still here, you — — money shark? Haven't you anything better to do than to come spying around me? Come, get out before I kick you out."

His bottled-up wrath seemed about to vent itself on the old man's head. At least Mr. Marks feared so, for he beat a hasty retreat, and with an agility surprising in one of his years, gave a leap which any young athlete might have envied and which landed him on the other side of the table. Billie was too much absorbed in his winnings to take notice, but Trehern laughed outright. Harrying importunate creditors was just the kind of sport he could appreciate.

The usurer, feeling comparatively secure behind his barricade, flourished the piece of paper he had in his hand. Even the worm will turn, and Mr. Marks was rapidly losing patience.

"Your note has come back protested," he cried. "I've been to your uncle, and he refuses to pay it. I can't afford to lose my thousand dollars. I want my

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money. I must have it at once. You're not treating me square."

The little man grew red in the face as he talked and flourished the paper excitedly, at the same time keeping an eye on the door in case it became necessary to make a quick exit.

Forrester shrugged his shoulders.

"Not treating you square," he echoed. "Haven't I ruined myself all these years paying your usurious rates of interest. Who treats me square? If I were treated square I shouldn't be compelled to go to usurers like you."

Mr. Marks looked pained, and shuffled uneasily on his feet.

"It's not fair to blame me, Mr. Robert, if you and your uncle are on the outs," he whined lachrymosely. "I've accommodated you several times when I wasn't sure of my money. You pay well for it, but I have my expenses—my risks. What are you going to do about this note? I want my money.

"Do?" echoed Forrester, "I'm going to do nothing. I'm down and out. I'm going to drown myself. Will that do you any good?"

Mr. Marks grinned. He was not without a sense of humor.

"You like to joke, Mr. Robert, but I'm serious. I want my money. I advanced you \$1,000 on your note. The results for you may be very disagreeable. If you don't pay this note by to-morrow noon, I shall know what to do."

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The only effect this covert threat had on the gambler was to increase his irritation. Advancing menacingly, his hands working dangerously, his eyes flashing, he cried:

"You can do what you d—— please. Now I've had about enough of you. You get on my nerves. Clear out! Do you hear? Clear out!"

Mr. Marks required no second bidding. He retreated backwards in the direction of the door, moving so quickly and easily in and out of the furniture that it seemed as if he must have eyes on the back of his head. Trehern, who had watched the manoeuvre with amused interest, guffawed loudly. When he reached the door Mr. Marks gained courage to fire a parting shot:

"You'll be sorry for this, Robert Forrester. No wonder your uncle turned you out of doors. I guess you're no good—like your notes!"

He dodged a beer bottle which Forrester picked up from a table and hurled at him, and banged the door. The bottle crashed into a mirror, smashing the glass into a thousand pieces, making the dog bark furiously, and startling Billie so that he nearly fell off his chair.

"Thank God he's gone! I'd have killed him if he stayed a minute longer," muttered Forrester, throwing himself into an arm-chair near the fire.

Trehern left Billie alone at the table and crossed over to his host.

"Up against it, old chap?" he asked sympathetically.

"Did you ever see such cursed luck?" growled Forrester savagely.

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"He had the cards all right," replied Trehern. Glancing at Billie, who was nodding in his chair, he added, in an undertone: "That comes of playing a straight game. It doesn't pay. Another ace would have given you the pot."

"What kind of a game do you suppose I play?" snapped Forrester. "Do you think I'm as expert in dealing myself aces from the bottom as you are?"

His mood was so ugly that Trehern removed the cigar from his mouth and stared at him.

"Say, young fellow," he said, "I guess you're out of sorts talking to an old pal that way. What's the matter?"

"I'm down and out. That's what's the matter," replied Forrester viciously. "My luck's gone back on me lately. I'm about cleaned out. I must make that note good to-morrow or my credit will be queered all over town. To-night I haven't a thousand cents."

Trehern was silent for a moment puffing his cigar. Then he said:

"I'd let you have it, old sport, if I had it, but I'm dead broke myself."

"A chronic condition with Mr. Creston Trehern," said Forrester laconically. "Oh, never mind," he went on, "I'll worry along somehow. I'll try my luck once more at Mansfield's to-night. My credit's good there for a couple of hundred. If I win it's all right. I'll be on my feet again. If I lose it's the river."

"Nonsense man," replied Trehern, "don't show the white feather just because you're down on your luck."

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You've always been game, Forrester. Don't be a quitter now. Don't throw away your hand before you've played the deal out. It's all in the cards, old chap. You're down to-day. To-morrow you'll be on top again."

Forrester shook his head.

"No, I guess I'm a dead 'un. I'm playing a losing game. I've reached the end of my rope. It's about time I chipped in. I guess Marks was right. I'm N. G."

He was silent a moment, and then he continued:

"I'm sick of the business, Trehern—sick of you—sick of the whole crowd. I'm going to chuck it—even if I get out of this scrape."

Trehern made no reply. He seemed lost in proud contemplation of his new patent-leather shoes. Billie had fallen asleep, his head had fallen back and from his open mouth issued a series of weird guttural sounds. Forrester lapsed into silence, staring vacantly into the fire as if seeking to read in the glowing embers in the grate a solution of the problem which faced him.

Presently he looked up, and glancing furtively at his two companions, as if anxious that his action should escape their notice, he drew from his pocket a letter. The handwriting was small and cramped and covered four sides of medium sized notepaper. The missive was crumpled and creased as if from many readings, but the contents were evidently of sufficient importance to the one to whom it was addressed to warrant still

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another perusal. As the young man read, his face darkened, and his fingers opened and shut convulsively, as persons do when they are under extreme nervous tension. When he had finished to the last word, he crushed the letter up in his hand, and a fierce oath involuntarily escaped his lips:

"Curse him!"

Trehern started and looked up.

"What's the matter, old chap? Talking in your sleep? Who are you cussing so vehemently?"

Forrester gazed at his friend without replying. Should he tell him? Why not? He would know sooner or later. It would be all over town in a few days. There was nothing to be gained by keeping the matter secret. Helping himself to a brandy and soda he threw the letter across to Trehern, saying:

"Here, read this. When my creditors learn what that letter contains they will be down upon me like a pack of yelping wolves."

Mystified, Trehern took the letter and first glanced at the signature. A light broke over his face.

"From your uncle!" he ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes—go on—read it," answered Forrester impatiently.

Trehern read as follows:

"As you have persisted in your reckless way of living and shown no disposition to reform I now notify you that to-morrow I shall make a new will leaving

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every cent I own to a hospital. There the money is likely to do more good than if I left it to be squandered in your hands. Yet I cannot leave you entirely without means. Your conduct and base ingratitude would justify me in abandoning you to perish in the gutter, but I cannot do that. There is—thank God—no tie of blood between us. The world believes you are my nephew. You alone know the secret of your origin. I can therefore wash my hands of you forever. I never wish to see your face again, but I consider it my duty to secure you from actual want. It is my intention to leave for you in trust a sum of money large enough to bring in an income of about \$700 a year. It will not be sufficient to provide for the extravagant style of living to which you have become accustomed, but at least it will save you from the disgrace of mendicancy when your evil passions have utterly ruined you. This duty performed I am done with you forever. You have forfeited all the affection I once bore you. I don't suppose you are troubled with a conscience or you would have blown your brains out long ago. But one day when it is too late you will realize what you have lost. You had a good friend in me; a brilliant future. You chose to sacrifice everything for your love of pleasure. You associated with bad companions who led you to your ruin. Finally I lost courage. I ordered you to leave my roof, and since that day I have banished you from my heart. This is the last time you will ever hear from me. Henceforth you must address yourself to my friend

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and attorney, Richard Bryce, who is the executor of
my will. (Signed) JOHN FORRESTER."

" Phew ! " exclaimed Trehern, with a low, expressive
whistle as he passed the letter back, " that's a knockout
all right—all right ! "

CHAPTER VII

IF you're not his nephew!" exclaimed Trehern when he had somewhat recovered from his astonishment, "who the devil are you?"

"I've no idea who my parents were," replied Forrester. Indifferently, he added: "What's more, I don't care a hang! They abandoned me, when an infant, on Mr. Forrester's doorstep."

"A foundling, eh?" grinned Trehern.

Forrester chewed viciously at his cigar without replying. Then bitterly he said:

"That's another reason why it's all one to me if school keeps or not. I've no one to leave behind. Whoever my people were, I guess they weren't much good! Yet who knows?"

A gentle expression, the first Trehern had ever seen, softened the hard lines in the gambler's face, as he continued:

"My mother may have been up against it. A woman's in desperate straits when she abandons her baby—you can bet on that. She must have loved me, too, for she left a note saying: '*Be good to him,*' and a valuable piece of jewelry intended, no doubt, to placate the strangers to whose care she confided me. That note and the locket are all the clues I have. One day they may help me to trace them—not that it really matters," he added cynically.

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"Where is the locket?" asked Trehern, suddenly interested.

Forrester crossed the room, and opening a drawer in a little desk, took out a little white box. Returning to his companion he held out a gold locket set with diamonds.

Trehern examined it critically.

"The workmanship is old-fashioned," he said, but it is curiously and beautifully engraved. The stones are magnificent. Have you any idea what it is worth?"

"I have never given it a thought," replied Forrester carelessly.

"I know something about diamonds," rejoined Trehern. "If that locket is worth a cent it is worth a thousand dollars."

"Is it?" replied Forrester, shrugging his shoulders. "I wouldn't care if it were worth ten times a thousand dollars. I wouldn't part with it for a million."

He slipped the locket in his pocket and returning to his seat by the fire, relapsed into a sullen silence. His faithful little terrier Spot, who had already forgiven the recent outrage on his canine dignity, tried to attract his master's attention by licking his hand, but Forrester paid no heed to his mute pleadings. After several ineffectual attempts to carry on a one-sided conversation, Trehern also ceased talking and soon there was an intense quiet, broken only by the loud snoring of Billie Willets, who was now fast asleep.

Forrester was entirely absorbed in his own thoughts. Trehern's remark had set him thinking. A foundling?

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Yes, he was nobody's child—his origin a mystery. Was it any wonder that he had gone to the devil? For all he knew, he came from the slums, his parents were some degraded creatures, perhaps criminals! That would account for everything. This irresistible, ungovernable passion for gambling, which had landed him in his present predicament, was a curse they had handed down to him. Furtively he glanced at his two companions.

His life and Trehern's, he thought to himself, had been practically identical. Both had been well educated, and both had gone to the devil. Forrester saw himself once more a schoolboy, careless, disobedient, wilful, romping noisily through the roomy, old-fashioned mansion on Second Avenue which was the only home he knew. He saw himself as he grew to manhood beset by all the temptations that await weak-minded, pleasure-loving young men to lure them to their ruin. Then began the inward struggle between self-indulgence and a feeble resolve to be worthy of his benefactor's ambition. But the pleasure call was irresistible, and fast companions did the rest. He knew Trehern was a rogue, he knew he had been partly instrumental in the wrecking of his career, yet he still associated with him and nourished no resentment. What was the use of breaking off with him? He must have companions of some sort, or he would go mad. Was he himself any better than Trehern? Dog does not eat dog.

"So the old man has actually cut you off!" said

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Trehern, as he helped himself to another cigar. "Of course, you'll contest the will?"

"Contest nothing!" retorted Forrester curtly. "I don't care a jot whether he disinherits me or not. He'll outlive me anyway. I'm about tired of it all."

"What do you mean to do—kill yourself?" asked Trehern cynically.

Forrester rose and paced the floor in silence. Suddenly he stopped short, and his fists clenched, his eyes flashing, his voice quivering, he cried:

"It's Bryce's doing—damn him! He never liked me. He has influenced the old man against me. If I had him here I'd wring his hypocritical neck!"

"Bryce?" echoed Trehern, as if puzzled. "Oh, yes—the lawyer."

"He's the guv'nor's crony. They've been friends for years. He and I never got along. One day he presumed to lecture me. I told him to go to h—ll. He never forgave me. The idea of having to look to him for a beggarly pittance is intolerable. I'd starve first."

Trehern puffed reflectively at his cigar. Then suddenly, as if struck by a bright idea, he asked:

"Have you tried diplomacy?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Forrester.

"Up to now, you have done nothing but fight the old man. Why not try the conciliatory dodge? Go and see Bryce. Say there has been a misunderstanding, that you have made mistakes, and so forth. He'll tell the old man and the trick's done. You'll be in favor again."

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Forrester shook his head.

"Go and toady to that cur? I've too much pride. I'd deserve to be kicked."

"Well, try something else," suggested the ingenious Trehern. "This Bryce has a niece. You're a fascinating chap—full of magnetism and all that sort of thing. She's young and probably impressionable. Go to Bryce's home. Make love to the girl. She'll fall in love with you and win the old man over."

Forrester smiled in spite of himself.

"Miss Bryce can't bear the sight of me. The mere mention of my name fills her with horror. Besides, I'm not a marrying man. You ought to know that by this time. There isn't a girl living that I'd waste five minutes on."

"Rats!" ejaculated Trehern, "you're a damned fool. You're just the kind of a man who marries well. You're not a bad looker. Most women like a man who is a bit of a black sheep. You'd have no difficulty in getting a girl with money. Then you wouldn't have to worry so much."

"You mean that my worries would then begin," replied Forrester with a forced laugh. "No, no women for me! They're nice to look at from a distance, sometimes they're delicious to kiss, but to deliberately enter into a legal contract tying oneself to one woman for the rest of one's natural life when one isn't sure that they will be able to bear the sight of each other longer than a week—that is something I could never do. No, I'd balk at marriage with any

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woman—no matter how charming she might be or how much money she might have. Besides, I have always despised men who sell themselves. They're contemptible curs."

"How much is the old man worth?" asked Trehern, as he carelessly blew smoke rings up to the ceiling.

"Two hundred thousand dollars or so," replied Forrester. "He owns the house in Second Avenue. Most of it, \$150,000 worth, is invested in gilt-edge bonds which he keeps in a big safe in the house."

Trehern removed the cigar from his mouth. His manner showed renewed interest as he exclaimed:

"One hundred and fifty thousand dollars worth of bonds in the house! Pretty risky, isn't it?"

"Somewhat. We always used to tell him he'd be robbed some day, but the old man is peculiar. He never would listen. I've often seen the big safe open and the bonds stuffed in the drawer like so much waste paper. He usually has several thousands in currency besides. When the governor wants anything out of the safe he thinks nothing of sending his man up for it. He's the most unsuspicious man that way. Take another drink."

Trehern paid no attention to the invitation. The question of the money seemed to engross his thoughts.

"It's hell to lose \$200,000!" he said with a grimace. "You could have some fun with \$200,000."

"And incidentally lend some to Creston Trehern," retorted Forrester sarcastically. "What's the good of crying over it? I don't get it, and there's the end of

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it. I'll have to hustle, for I'm broke—stone broke. I haven't a cent in the world." With grim determination, he continued: "To-night I'm going to Joe Mansfield's, and I'll break the bank. If I win, all right. I'll be on my legs again; if I lose it's the river."

Trehern chewed his cigar for a moment. Looking around at the expensive furnishings, he said:

"You don't need all this stuff. Sell it."

Forrester shook his head.

"It's not mine to sell—not a stick of it. The things belong to an auctioneer. They are here to be sold on commission, as opportunity offers. It doesn't offer. My surroundings look prosperous. One can't judge by appearances. I haven't even a bed I can call my own. My very clothes are not paid for."

Trehern was not listening. He had risen and was bending over Billie's prostrate form.

"Look!" he said in a whisper, turning to Forrester, and holding up a bunch of bills he had extracted from the kid's vest pocket. "The kid has a cool thousand here. Someone is sure to get away with it. Suppose you and I divvy up—what do you say? Then we'll put him in a cab and deposit him somewhere in Central Park. He'll wake up not knowing how he got there. He'll think someone did him up. See?"

He had not finished speaking when Forrester was upon him with a grip of steel.

"Not that!" thundered the gambler. "None of your dirty tricks here, Trehern! That man is under my roof! You shan't rob him! I may be down and out, but I'm not a thief—not yet!"

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Shamefacedly, Trehern fell back, attempting to laugh it off.

"Can't you see a joke?" he said confusedly.

"That kind of humor lands one in Sing Sing," retorted Forrester curtly. Wrathfully he turned and faced his companion. "It's only when I see anything of that sort that I realize my own degradation. You're a born crook, and always will be, and the world puts me in the same class because I associate with you."

Trehern sprang to his feet, his fists clenched, as if about to resent the insult.

"You'll take that back!" he exclaimed angrily.

Forrester did not stir. Looking his companion straight in the face, and with a contemptuous ring in his voice, he said, slowly:

"You and I might as well understand each other, Creston Trehern. I don't know how I've put up with you so long. If I'd shaken you long ago perhaps I'd be in a better fix to-day. But now I'm through with you, do you hear—through with you. I don't want to see your ugly face here again. I may be no good myself, I may have been guilty of every kind of folly, I owe money right and left, I have disgraced my friends and beggared myself by my gambling and idiotic extravagances, but I'm not a crook. I've never done a dishonest act in my life. I'm on the level, no matter which way the cards run. My record is clean. That's why my credit's still good at Mansfield's, when they wouldn't trust you for the price of a glass of beer. I'm going to win to-night, do you hear? And I'm

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going to quit the game for good. That's why I don't want to have anything more to do with you. You've been my ruin. I want to see the last of you, and I propose to say good-bye now."

Treherm was about to make an angry retort when suddenly there was a terrific nasal explosion. Billie had sneezed. The shock aroused the fat youth from his Gargantuan slumber, and he sat up rubbing his eyes.

"Say, fellers, have I been asleep? Did I win the pot or did I only dream it?" He put his hand in his pocket to feel if the money was really there.

"You got the money all right!" growled Forrester.

Billie looked at his watch.

"By Jupiter, boys, it's nearly six o'clock. I must be going. Coming my way, Treherm. Good-bye, Forrester. Shall I see you to-night?"

"Yes, I'll be there," answered Forrester, "and I'm going to win, too! You'll see more spectacular playing to-night Billie, so come early."

"What time will you be there?" asked Billie.

"At ten o'clock—not later. I want all the time I can get, for I'm going to break the bank. I feel it!"

"All right, I'll be there at ten o'clock," said Billie. "Come, Treherm."

Taking his hat he went out. Treherm, who was following him, stopped at the door, and turned round.

"So it's good-bye for you and me, is it?"

"Yes," said Forrester coldly. "The sooner the better."

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"All right, Mr. Bob Forrester. I'm glad to play an open game. I'll know what cards to draw now."

He slammed the door and was gone.

Long after their departure, Forrester sat motionless, staring moodily into the fire. He had switched off the lights, and in the darkened room, his tall figure dimly silhouetted against the windows, his pale, haggard face lit up at intervals by the fitful flickers of the expiring embers in the grate, he presented a picture of utter discouragement. Even Spot knew something was wrong. His master was often irascible, and at times spoke harshly to him, but never before had he received such a vicious kick. His canine feelings were hurt more than his body, but Spot did not bear malice. With sound dog logic he reasoned that if his master kicked him he doubtless deserved it, and seeing him so dejected his unerring instinct told him that the trouble was serious, so he whined and rubbed his cold nose against the gambler's hand, at the same time looking appealingly up into his face and asking as eloquently as any dog can:

"What's the matter? Can I be of any help?"

Forrester patted the terrier on the head, already sorry for his brutality.

"Poor old Spot! We've been good pals, haven't we?" The dog wagged his tail, bounding in the air with barks of delight. "Yes—yes—I know you're sorry for me. I'm hard up against it, Spot, old boy. Unless the luck turns to-night I guess you'll soon have another master."

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It was only now, when he had lost literally his last dollar, that Forrester realized the seriousness of his position. After ten years of unchecked indulgence in every pleasure, every folly a sensual nature can crave for, he was face to face with ruin. Of the thousands of dollars that had passed through his hands nothing remained. He owed right and left, his creditors were already clamoring at his heels, each day adding to the hue and cry. Thus far everybody had been patient in the belief that one day he would inherit a fortune from his benefactor, but directly his creditors got wind of the fact that the merchant had abandoned him to his fate, New York would become too hot to hold him.

Suddenly the clock on the mantelpiece struck seven, and thus rudely aroused from his reflections, he started nervously to his feet and hastily began to dress.

Everything depended upon what the cards had in store for him to-night at Mansfield's. The stakes would be the highest he had ever risked, for literally he would be playing for life itself. If he won he might still show a bold front to the world, settle with the importunate Marks, and the most pressing of his other creditors, defy Mr. Forrester and Bryce and extricate himself from his present scrape.

But if he lost? Hardened and indifferent as he was to the decree of the green cloth, the gambler felt a cold chill run down his spine. Only now he fully realized what it means to lose one's all on the turn of a card. If he lost to-night it meant the end of his credit—the end of him. He would have to take what

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funds he could manage to scrape together and begin life all over again somewhere else.

Would life be worth living under such changed conditions? As he stood before the mirror arranging his white tie, he surveyed himself. He saw a tall, aristocratic-looking man, a young but old face, deeply furrowed, almost ghastly white, the black hair beginning to turn white.

"Only thirty-three," he muttered, "and practically through with life. Yes—through with it! I'm tired of it all, tired of its pleasures, tired of its difficulties."

Had the life he had led afforded him such keen pleasure that he would look forward to living it over again, even under the most favorable conditions? Outside the fascination of gambling, a fever which had never left him, he had no interest in life. There was no one he cared for, no one who cared for him. He was practically alone in the world. The few men he associated with he despised because none better than he knew their worthlessness. He felt a certain respect for Joe Mansfield, the master gambler, and Billie Willets amused him; but these were not friends in any real sense. Of home or domestic life, such as he supposed other men enjoyed, he knew nothing. He always felt he could not endure it, yet at times he felt a strange yearning for it. Woman—that is, the virtuous woman—was an unknown creature to him. All he knew were the harpies who plied their ancient profession in the Tenderloin and had helped to rob him of his money. Socially he was an outcast. His

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temperament had made any other kind of life impossible.

Life, as he knew it, was hollow and unsatisfying. He was weary of it. He would not care if he died to-morrow. It would be preferable to facing poverty and want. He would not have the courage to face hardships after a life of luxury. It was only the excitement of the gaming table that made life endurable. If he had no money he could not gamble. No—if he lost at Mansfield's there was only one way out.

His throat felt parched, and he gulped down a glass of water. His skin seemed to be on fire, while his pulse was beating rapidly. Luck had turned against him, that was certain. He would probably go on losing, losing until his last cent was gone, and he was reduced to beg for his bread. He, the successful plunger, a pitiable object of charity, despised and shunned by his former associates. Better dead than that! If the cards went against him to-night he would put a bullet through his brain. One touch on the trigger and all would be over. No more worries. He would be at peace.

He wondered if he would have the courage to shoot himself, and if he would feel any pain. Suppose he bungled it and only succeeded in wounding himself? Crossing the room he opened a drawer of his desk and took out a revolver. It was a handsome weapon, a 32-calibre Colt, silver mounted and engraved with his initials. Then turning to the long mirror between the windows he took a chair and with the weapon still in

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his hand placed himself directly facing it. Then, slowly, as if seeking carefully the proper angle, he placed the muzzle of the revolver to his right temple.

"That's it!" he muttered half aloud. "It takes only a moment's nerve." With an involuntary shudder, he added: "It's horrible to think that one little pressure on this trigger and I should be beyond recall."

Again he lowered the bright weapon and once more looked at his reflection in the mirror and muttered:

"Only thirty-three last month! It's young to cash in one's chips. The guv'nor might have given me another chance. Things would have been different if——"

Once more he took from his pocket the letter received that morning and read again the passage:

"To-morrow I shall make a new will, leaving every cent I have to a hospital."

Crushing the letter convulsively in his hand, he sank down in a chair.

"To-morrow?" he muttered, "to-morrow? That's to-day, Wednesday. Perhaps at this very moment, only a short distance from here, they are signing the new will that robs me of my inheritance. Two hundred thousand dollars lost, and I practically without a cent."

Suddenly he stopped short and began to make a hurried search through his pockets. Finding nothing, he went on:

"Why, I haven't even money to play with to-night. Suppose Mansfield isn't there and they refuse me

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credit? I'm done for then, without having even had a fighting chance." Desperately, he added: "I must get money somewhere! But how—how? Marks won't lend me any more! I can't raise any. My rings are pawned—even my watch is gone! What the devil can I do?"

He became silent. His face, whiter and more drawn, looked ghastly and haggard, his fingers opened and closed convulsively. Rising, he nervously paced the floor. He seemed to be struggling mentally, as if striving to reject a suggestion that had suddenly presented itself.

Suddenly the clock struck the half hour. There was no time to be lost. If it was to be done at all it must be done at once. Going quickly to the desk he took his revolver, and slipping the glittering weapon into his pocket, he turned off the electric lights and left the apartment. As he mingled with the crowds on Broadway the clock in Herald Square was just striking half past seven.

CHAPTER VIII

VIEWED casually from the outside, No. — West Thirty-seventh Street, Manhattan, did not differ materially from the thousands of similar brownstone four-story dwellings, severe, prim looking and monotonously identical in architectural design and color which are characteristics of the old style city residence. But there was something bizarre, even sinister, about this particular house which never failed to immediately arrest attention. Not only did its exterior present certain peculiar features lacking in the other houses in the block, but there exuded from it an atmosphere of secrecy as mysterious, forbidding and impenetrable as the prohibited territory of the Great Lhama. It breathed defiance and appeared to resent even observation. No living person ever was seen within, the heavy door was kept always closed, and the blinds were drawn at every window, as if to baffle public curiosity and prevent any chance passerby catching a glimpse of what was going on inside. The most remarkable feature was the front entrance, which was a built-out portico, massively constructed, as if for the purpose of successful resistance in case of attack. Sometimes a postman or messenger boy approached this frowning portal and rang the bell. The door opened a few inches, a hand was thrust out to receive the letter or parcel, and the door was as

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quickly slammed to again. An unwelcome caller would have as much chance of entering unannounced the presence of the President at Washington as gaining admission to this house of mystery. Constantly guarded by invisible sentinels, no one could put foot even in the vestibule unless he were personally known to the burly Cerberus who stood concealed behind the little grating in the door.

This was Mansfield's, the gambling house of the most notorious and richest gambler in America, the man who had set the law at defiance and challenged the district attorney to interfere with his business, and in his arrogance built himself in modern New York a fortified stronghold like some insolent feudal baron in the Middle Ages. "Joe" Mansfield, his intimates called him, and he counted among his friends the most influential men in the country—politicians, financiers, railroad magnates, merchant princes, millionaires, men in whom the gambling spirit was irresistible, who found the excitement of Wall Street's ticker game too tame a pastime and sought in Mansfield's splendidly appointed rooms the gratification of their secret passion for high play.

Among many others who had acquired through the painful process of an expensive initiation the privilege of unchallenged entry at all hours was Billie Willets. The unsophisticated Chicago youth had been taken to the place by Forrester shortly after he first arrived in New York, with his pockets bulging with yellow backs, and thousands of good sausage-made dollars had

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danced merrily into Joe Mansfield's coffers before the lad awoke to the fact that he was playing the ridiculous role of a natural born sucker. He was more wary after he had cut his wisdom teeth and risked his money more cautiously, but he had continued to frequent the establishment, playing occasionally, generally to the profit of the house. When, therefore, he presented himself in West Thirty-seventh street shortly after nine o'clock, he did not have to trouble to ring. The vigilant watcher had seen his approach. The massive door swung noiselessly inward, and as Billie stepped across the threshold the stalwart porter respectfully touched his cap.

"Good evening, Mr. Willets. Isn't Mr. Forrester with you to-night?"

Billie stopped short.

"Didn't Forrester come yet?" he exclaimed in surprise.

"No, sir," replied the man. "I've been on duty here since eight o'clock. Mr. Forrester couldn't have come in without my seeing him."

"The devil!" spluttered Billie. "He said he would surely be here at nine o'clock."

"Mr. Trehern's upstairs, sir," said the doorman. "I let him in a few minutes ago, sir."

Divesting himself of his coat, Billie hurried upstairs in search of Trehern.

If the gloomy exterior of the house was suggestive of a prison, a single glimpse of its interior quickly dispelled that impression. Inside the place was a

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veritable Alladin's palace, decorated and furnished with all the prodigality and luxury which money, easily earned and spent without counting, could command. Its size, seen from the street, was deceptive. An old-fashioned house of extraordinary width, it had been completely remodelled to suit its owner, and as the peculiar nature of his business demanded a special exotic atmosphere, with ultra-luxurious surroundings conducive to the right mood for reckless play, neither pains nor money had been spared in making the rooms aristocratically showy and beautiful.

The entire basement, for a hundred feet back, was arranged like a Roman atrium or entrance hall. The walls were lined with Italian marble and the floor was paved with mosaics in striking designs and colors, and scattered with valuable Oriental rugs. But what first struck the eye on entering was the magnificent white marble staircase which led to the gaming rooms above. Constructed entirely of flawless Parian marble and beautifully sculptured, it was said to have cost its proprietor no less than \$20,000. At the head of the first broad sweep of stairs stood a gilded figure, life size, of the Goddess of Chance, gracefully poised on a pedestal and bearing the horn of plenty. On either side of the marble staircase, and serving to screen the domestic offices, two Roman fountains splashed lazily perfumed water, in which floated white lilies. The walls of the hall were painted a Pompeiian red with gold frescoing, and hung with large tapestries. Placed here and there all around the hall were low Roman

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settees of stone, while electric globes, flittering through Tiffany glass of rich colors, cast a soft radiance. Here Joe Mansfield came to greet the guest within his gates, the cordiality of his welcome depending largely on the financial strength of his visitor.

Yet, artistic as was this reception hall, its splendors were completely eclipsed on the floor above, where the gaming tables were installed. Here virtually was a replica of Europe's famous Monte Carlo on a smaller scale. The entire floor from Thirty-seventh street to some two hundred feet back was devoted to the gaming tables, the one large room being divided by portières into three smaller rooms. The decorations were extremely rich. The walls were covered with crimson silk, with white oval panels containing delicate Watteau paintings, while on the vaulted ceilings, heavily moulded with gold work in relief, were paintings executed by famous European artists. In the first room were four tables with roulette wheels, in the second a similar number equipped for faro, while in the lounging room beyond was a long buffet table spread with all kinds of tempting cold delicacies and wines to stimulate the flagging energies of the players. Entering the spacious rooms from the grand staircase the first view was dazzling. The radiant refulgence of some fifty crystal electroliers, the white marble statuary, the splendid paintings, costly Louis XIV. furniture, carpets and hangings, the scene animated by groups of men in evening dress moving around the different tables—all this made up a brilliant and fascinating spectacle.

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Billie entered the rooms and looked around for his friends among the men who, four rows deep, pressed eagerly around the gaming tables. Notwithstanding the large crowd and the considerable sums of money that were being risked on the turn of a card, there was neither noise nor excitement. It was even more quiet than many a drawing-room filled with well-bred people. Talking was carried on in undertones, and the thick carpets muffled the footsteps. Attendants moved about, impressive and silent. The only audible sounds were the rattle of the whizzing roulette ball, the monotonous, passionless voices of the croupiers and dealers as they announced the winning or losing cards and numbers, and an occasional curse muttered by some luckless player as he withdrew, white faced, from the table where he had lost—his all! Yet the unnatural quiet only intensified the tenseness in the air, the expression of feverish eagerness on every face. One felt that the business on hand was serious. All seemed engaged in some desperate struggle, some fierce contest which not only sapped their energies but on which they had staked their very soul. They were the gamblers, frenzied with their lust for quick-gotten gold, a few drawing prizes, most reaping ruin, but all worshipping Mammon, the modern god.

Billie knew nearly every one by sight, and he exchanged nods right and left, but he sought in vain for Forrester. There was no sign of him. Presently, he ran across Mr. Walters, the manager, who was watching a faro table, and he accosted him.

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"Have you seen anything of Forrester to-night? He said he'd be here at nine o'clock."

"No, he hasn't been in yet. I'd have seen him if he'd come," replied the manager, a dapper little man, with keen eyes like a hawk, which let nothing in the rooms escape him. With a grin, he added: "I expected myself to see Forrester here to-night. He's been down on his luck lately. He threatened to come and break the bank."

"That's just it," said Billie. "He needs the money. He's in a devil of a fix. Uncle soured on him and all that sort of thing. Oh, there's Trehern! Perhaps he's seen him."

He hurried into the adjoining room where he had caught sight of Creston Trehern, who was sitting talking with another man.

"Hello, Trehern! Do you know where Forrester is?" asked Billie as he joined them.

"How should I know where he is? Am I his keeper?" replied Trehern curtly.

His tone was so short that Billie merely turned on his heel and walked away. He had heard enough that afternoon to know that Trehern and Forrester had parted bad friends, but he was hardly prepared for this snub to himself. However, he was just as glad to move on, for he had recognized in Trehern's companion, Steve Marston, a man of shady antecedents, whose acquaintance he hardly wished to cultivate. He liked Forrester and would stick to him, no matter what Graham and the other fellows said, and he had tolerated

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Trehern because Forrester associated with him, but that did not say he was to hobnob with every crook in town.

The truth was that Trehern had begun to look upon Billie Willets as a lamb which had been sheared of all its wool, and, therefore, unprofitable to waste further time on. Besides, just at that moment he was trying to interest Marston in an enterprise which, if successful, would net them a cool \$100,000 apiece.

"You must decide at once," said Trehern, in a low tone. "It's to-night or not at all."

Marston, a lantern-jawed, long-fingered man, with furtive eyes and a cunning smile, gave an uneasy glance around before he answered.

"Not so fast, Trehern. If you were just out of jail you wouldn't be so chesty. You'd think twice before running your bloomin' head into the noose again. What do you want me to do?"

"Can you sell the stuff if I get it?" asked Trehern cautiously.

"What will it be?"

"Bonds, most of it. Can you get rid of them? You've done so before."

"Yes," replied Marston with a grimace, "and done my bit for it in Joliet."

"Well, it's 'yes' or 'no'!" exclaimed Trehern impatiently. "If I bring you the bonds to-night can you sell them?"

"Bonds can only be disposed of in some large city," answered Marston, after a moment's thought. "New

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York is impossible, for the alarm would put everybody on the alert. The numbers of the bonds may be known. Chicago offers greater opportunities than any other American city, but it would be safer to sell them in Europe. How much did you say?"

"About \$150,000—perhaps more!" said Trehern eagerly. His face was flushed, and his speech trembled from nervousness.

Marston's deep sunken eyes glittered, and he gave a low whistle.

"Phew! One doesn't get a chance like that every day. Is it a bank?"

"No," whispered Trehern, "a private house—old man living alone. It's a cinch—are you on?"

"Count on me. It's a go. What instructions?"

Trehern rose, and said:

"I'm going now. Don't let anyone know I've left the building. I'll get out through the back. An alibi may be useful—one never knows. Meet me at seven o'clock to-morrow morning at the Jersey City ferry. I shall be carrying a valise—containing the bonds."

He glided away and Marston nonchalantly lighted a cigarette and sauntered up to one of the tables to watch the play.

At the roulette table, the wheel was in full swing, each fall of the tiny ivory ball into its socket bringing joy or anguish to the men who wooed the fickle Goddess of Chance.

"Make your bets, gentlemen!"

The monotonous voice of the croupier rose above

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the hum of voices and the click of the ball as it started on its circular journey. There was a dead silence, as a hundred eager eyes followed its swift flight until it fell with a rattle into one of the sockets.

"Eight! Black and even!" announced the croupier in his indifferent, weary tone. With his ivory rake he drew in the losses and then handed stacks of chips to the lucky winners.

"Hello, Mr. Willets. In bad luck to-night, eh? Where's your friend Forrester?"

Billie, who had just lost ten dollars on the red, turned to greet a tall, thin man of aristocratic appearance. It was Joe Mansfield, king of the gamblers.

His evening dress, clean shaven face, white hair and quiet, unobtrusive manner gave Mansfield the appearance of a gentleman. Yet he was not ashamed to acknowledge his calling. In fact, it pleased his vanity to be styled king of the gamblers. It was a title which he had earned on many a sensational occasion when quickness of judgment and coolness of nerve was necessary to avert a catastrophe. He was a true gambler. He never played at his own tables, but he plunged heavily in Wall Street and on the race tracks, and no man was more ready to take a chance. At his own tables there was no bet that he would not accept. Usually there was a limit on the play, but if requested to do so by a responsible patron he was always willing to take the limit off altogether. One night a lucky player won \$100,000 at roulette, breaking the bank several times, but Mansfield did not turn a

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hair. Suave and self-possessed as ever, he brought from his safe more stacks of yellow bills, and the game continued. He left most of the details to his manager, but he was not idle. It was his custom to flit quietly from room to room and watch for a few moments the play at each table, surveying the general situation. He would study his patrons, calculating their winnings or their power to withstand further losses, lending this man money, advising that one to quit. His relations with his patrons were always cordial. If there was anything unpleasant to be done, such as ejecting an obstreperous player or refusing a persistent borrower further credit, that duty devolved upon the dapper and ubiquitous Mr. Walters.

No ordinary ability could have won for Mansfield his proud title, King of Gamblers. The secret of his success had been unusual capacity for organization, a polished, gentlemanly demeanor, a thorough knowledge of human nature, the coolness and imperturbability of the born gambler, and above all the possession of those rare virtues—diplomacy, tact, discretion. Men occupying the most responsible positions in New York's commercial life, bank presidents and others, the slightest reflection on whose characters might imperil the institutions of which they were the head, had lost many thousands of dollars at his tables, yet no word of the identity of the losers was ever allowed to reach the outer world. His croupiers and employes were well trained. Secrecy! Secrecy! That was Mansfield's watchword, and the policy had paid him well.

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He had made influential friends as well as money. Men prominent in the affairs of the nation, who would have shrunk from having their names linked with his, secretly gave him a friendly nod when they chanced to meet in public. They never knew when they might need him. Mansfield was generous with his cheque-book—to the right kind of borrower. At one time he was said to have in his safe I. O. U.'s, all signed by well-known names, to the tune of \$750,000.

Mansfield never made a mistake. His instinct was unerring. He knew whom to lend to and whom to refuse. Courteous as a Chesterfield to the man he favored, he could be merciless as a Marat to anyone who betrayed his confidence. His personal fortune was estimated at three millions, a goodly share of which he had spent in making his establishment the most magnificently appointed gambling house in the world. The authorities were always threatening him, but the influence behind him checkmated all the measures taken against his establishment. It was his boast that he was above the law, and many believed him. In view, however, of the recent election to office of a strenuous district attorney, who had started in to make a series of spectacular raids, Mansfield took no chances. He had rendered his house impregnable and safe for his patrons in case of attack. There were all kinds of electric devices to give the alarm, double doors and shutters built of solid steel and secret chambers and subterranean passages for rapid flight in case the outworks were carried. One day it was rumored that

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the belligerent district attorney had made a special trip uptown to Thirty-seventh street, in order to study the ground preparatory to making a determined raid. Mansfield laughed at the story. He defied the police to do their worst. Faro and roulette went on at full blast, the house always dark and mysterious from the street, but a blaze of light and a whirl of frenzied excitement within.

"I expected to find Forrester here," replied Billie, in answer to the gambler's query. "I can't imagine what's keeping him. He was positive he'd be here." Glancing at his watch, he added: "It's half past eleven, and he's not come yet."

"He'll be along presently," replied Mansfield. "The night's young yet. Forrester's got a way of both coming and going late." He pointed to a man who was standing some distance away. "There's Bradley. He may be able to tell you where he is."

"Yes. I'll go and ask him."

As the fat youth hurried away an elderly man, distinguished in appearance, but having on his face the marks of great mental anguish, came up to Mansfield and spoke to him in a low tone. The gambler listened coldly, and then shook his head.

"No, sir, not another dollar."

The man clenched his hands and raised his voice.

"I've lost three thousand here to-night, Mansfield. I'm cleaned out. You can't refuse to give me a chance to get some of it back. Let me have another \$500 worth of chips. You know I'm good for it."

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Mansfield's square jaws snapped to with a click, and his mouth took on the determined, merciless expression that boded no good for anyone asking favors.

"If I thought you were good for it you wouldn't have to ask twice. My employé refused you further credit by my orders. You have been playing recklessly. You already owe several hundred dollars. I'm a gambler, not a banker."

The man turned deathly white.

"For God's sake, Mansfield, let me have the money! I know my luck will turn. To-morrow I'll give you a note endorsed by one of the biggest men in town."

Mansfield shook his head.

"It's useless to insist. My decision is final. You can't have the money."

"But I must have it, do you hear?" cried the man fiercely. "I've lost thousands here. I've robbed my friends, my bank, my children, to come and gamble in your cursed house, and it's all gone! You owe me that. Give me a chance to get some of it back or I'm ruined, entirely ruined!"

"I won't let you have a cent! Now leave me in peace!"

The man, desperate, sprang forward, as if about to strike the gambler, but Mansfield merely pushed him aside and passed unconcernedly on, stopping a little further on to chat with this patron, exchange a jest with that one, while the unfortunate he had repulsed stared after him like one in a dream, and with a muttered curse, made his way slowly downstairs to the street.

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Twelve o'clock and still no sign of Forrester. Billie despaired now of seeing him at all and concluded that something important had occurred to prevent him coming. What the business was he could not conjecture. Meantime, he stood with Bradley watching the play at the faro table. On the green cloth table in front of the dealer was the "lay-out," and the metal box containing the pack of fifty-two cards. Two players, one a notorious Tenderloin gambler, cool and methodical, the other a young millionaire, flushed and excited, were betting one-hundred-dollar bills on the chance of certain cards coming out of the box. The game had a strange fascination and to Billie it seemed easy. He was itching to play, but Bradley pulled him back.

"Let it alone," he whispered. "They'll take all you've got and more besides."

"Why," demanded the unsophisticated youth, "isn't it on the level?"

"Oh, it's straight enough here, probably. Mansfield wouldn't dare run a crooked game in these rooms, not because his conscience wouldn't allow him, but because it wouldn't pay. Straight or crooked, they'd get your money anyhow." Mysteriously he added: "It's said that there are rooms upstairs where they have a doctored lay-out. When Trehern or their other touts catch a drunken young millionaire they take him up to this private room and skin him to the King's taste."

"I don't see how they can cheat at faro," objected Billie, puzzled. "The game seems simple enough.

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The card comes out of the box in full view of the player; you simply bet on whether it comes out to lose or win."

Bradley, who was an old rounder, smiled in pity at Billie's ignorance.

"That's just where kids like you get their fleece singed," he said. "If the play is crooked, they work with a special box called a high lay-out. It's larger than the ordinary box, and the lower part is concealed by the table. Underneath is a spring which the dealer can manipulate with his knee. In the box there is a tiny peep-hole through which the dealer can see what cards lie near the top. If they are not what he wants, all he has to do is to touch the spring and a little mechanical arm shoots out and removes the card. Could anything be more simple?"

Leaving the faro tables, they strolled into the inner room where the play at roulette was in full swing. The chance the spinning ball gave of higher gains had attracted a larger crowd. Billie decided that he would try his luck again, and tossing a twenty dollar bill to the croupier, he received four \$5 chips in exchange. One he placed on the red, and one on the numbers 16, 3, 22. Billie was superstitious, and these numbers, representing important interests in his life, he felt must come out. Sixteen was his collar size. Three was the number of years he had been in New York. Twenty-two was his age.

"Make your bets, gentlemen."

The little ball started. Billie held his breath. If

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it fell into either of the numbers he would win \$180. But it didn't. It shot into number 5. Bradley laughed.

"Don't be foolish, Billie," he said. "If you've got money to throw away, play poker or Wall Street or any old thing that gives you some kind of a run for your money. Don't chuck it away."

"What!" ejaculated Billie, "isn't roulette straight either?"

"Oh, I suppose so," answered Bradley, with a cynical laugh. "But I'd hate to bet all I've got on it. There are devices well known to these professional gamblers which enable them to beat the player every time. I don't say Mansfield uses such a device, but he knows all about it, you can bet on that. They can stop that little ball where and when they like. The wheel is controlled by an electrical device which enables the croupier, by a touch, to contract the holes into which the ball falls. For instance, if the bets are heavy on the number 10, a single pressure ensures the ball falling into some other number. Come, let's go and have a bite, I'm famished."

Deserting the players they proceeded to the refreshment buffet, where obsequious waiters presented toothsome delicacies on dainty china, and plied them with foaming bumpers of sparkling champagne.

In the rooms they had left the gambling never stopped for an instant. Men forgot they were hungry, in the excitement of the play.

"Make your bets, gentlemen!" cried the weary croupiers.

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"Hello, Steve!"

Marston, absorbed in watching the fluctuating fortunes of the roulette players started violently. Only too well did he know that voice. Turning, he saw at his elbow a man of herculean build, a broad-shouldered, heavy-booted person, who seemed on intimate terms with everybody in the place, from the doorkeeper up.

"Mr. Campbell!" he ejaculated.

"Who'd have thought of seeing Steve Marston here to-night!" laughed the newcomer.

"Didn't you know I was out?" asked Marston in a low tone. "I thought you detectives were wise to everything."

"It's pretty hard to keep tab on you fellows!" answered the sleuth good-humoredly. "When was your time up?"

"I got six months off for good behavior."

"How long are you going to keep out of jail?" laughed Campbell.

Marston eyed the detective furtively and apprehensively. What had he come to Mansfield's for? Not to play, that was certain. The detective was too valuable a policeman to be loafing in gambling houses merely for the pleasure of it. Was it possible that he knew something of Trehern's game? It was now one o'clock. Three hours had gone by since Trehern left. Perhaps he had got into trouble, and had implicated him. Cautiously he answered:

"I guess I'll keep out if you let me alone? I've had my fill."

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The detective smiled grimly, like one conscious of his power.

"Don't worry, Steve. You've done your bit. Behave yourself and we'll be good. I'm after bigger game than you to-night. So long!"

With a careless nod, the detective passed on. Marston stood watching his retreating figure a few minutes, then with a furtive glance around to see if anyone noticed him, he quietly slipped out of the room, and, making his way downstairs, left the building.

"Make your bets, gentlemen!" cried the croupiers.

Suddenly Mr. Mansfield, apparently laboring under some excitement, entered the faro room and called his manager:

"Walters—come here, just a minute!"

It was so unusual to see Joe Mansfield flustered that Mr. Walters stared at his employer in surprise. There was nothing to trouble him as far as he knew. The tables were making good money. Wall Street was quiet. He had dined well, and his digestion was in good working order. He waited.

"Walters," said Mansfield in a whisper, "there is something on foot to-night that puzzles me."

"Something on foot—what do you mean, sir?" demanded the astonished manager.

"Campbell—the precinct detective—is here," answered Mansfield nervously. "When I saw him I was scared. I thought the district attorney was about to make a raid, but Campbell assures me there is no danger of that. He says he'd know if anything like

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that was on foot and would tip us off. But he's certainly mysterious. He wouldn't tell me what he's here for. He's out on business, all right."

"Where is he now?" asked the manager. "I haven't seen him."

"He's just gone. He didn't find his man. He said he might come back. It looks queer. I don't like it. We had better be prepared. I've done Campbell many a good turn since he's been detective in this precinct. I don't think he would deliberately deceive me, but it's as well to be on the safe side. You had better close up what tables are not actually running, and see that all the people are ready at the first alarm to rush the paraphernalia to the secret room. Look to the outer doors, double the look-outs, and see that the emergency exits are ready to open at the first sign of danger. If the district attorney breaks his way in here, he must not see a trace of anything, do you understand?"

Mr. Walters hurried away to carry out these instructions and Mr. Mansfield resumed his surveillance of the various tables.

At the buffet, Billie Willets and his companion were doing more than justice to the elaborate spread provided by the liberal proprietor. Truffles, chicken salad, cold tongue sandwiches, disappeared down Billie's throat with amazing rapidity, until finally, his voracious appetite appeased, the stout youth concluded that he would go home. It was half past one. There was no use waiting any longer for Forrester. So

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bidding Bradley good-night, he made his way out, and had started down the grand staircase, when he caught sight of a man who was just coming up. Billie stopped short. The man looked like Forrester, and yet he didn't. He was staggering from side to side, steadying himself by the bannisters, as if intoxicated. As he came nearer there was no doubt possible. It was Bob Forrester.

CHAPTER IX

BEWILDERED, not knowing what to think, Billie started down the stairs to meet Forrester. It was certainly he, but in what a condition! He had seen his friend under all kinds of circumstances but never in such a state as this! He did not appear to be drunk, for there was no suggestion of drink about him, yet he staggered like an intoxicated man. His eyes were bloodshot, his face deathly white, his hair disarranged, his tie unfastened, his linen rumped, and he had a wild, glassy stare.

"For God's sake, Forrester!" exclaimed Billie. "Is this the way you keep appointments? I've been here since ten o'clock and now it's after one!" With an aggrieved air, he added: "And to turn up in such a condition, too! Where have you been?"

"Who gave you permission to catechise me?" exclaimed Forrester savagely. "If you can't keep a civil tongue in you head, shut up!"

He staggered, tried to catch the bannister and missed it. If Billie had not caught him, he would have fallen the entire length of the stairs. Seeing that something serious was the matter, Billie tried to humor him.

"Come upstairs," he said. "You can sit down a bit, and I'll get you a bracer. You're ill."

"I've been in a mix-up," said Forrester hoarsely.

"In a mix-up—what do you mean?"

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"In a fight—is that so hard to understand?" replied Forrester irritably.

Having reached with difficulty the anteroom leading to the gaming tables, he staggered to a divan and, sitting down, buried his face in his hands.

"Don't you feel well, old chap?" asked Billie anxiously. "Let me get a doctor."

Forrester shook his head impatiently.

"I've been in a fight, I tell you! They nearly did me up! I've been doped! Get me some whiskey, and I'll be all right. Some whiskey, quick!

Billie sprinted to the buffet, leaving Forrester sitting on the divan in a state bordering on collapse. He was just outside the gaming rooms, a corner of the house entirely deserted, and so there was no one to notice him. He remained motionless until Billie returned with the whiskey.

"Here—drink that!"

Forrester took the glass, but his hand was shaking so violently that half the contents spilled to the ground. As he raised it to his lips Billie caught sight of something that made him start.

"Why!" he exclaimed in alarm, "your shirt bosom is spotted with blood!"

Forrester took his handkerchief from his pocket and tried to wipe out the stains. In an irritated tone he snapped:

"Didn't I tell you I'd been in a fight?"

At that moment Joe Mansfield came out on the landing and caught sight of them:

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"Hello, Bob," he cried cheerfully. "You're late to-night." Noticing his condition, he added: "What's the matter, man? You don't look well."

Forrester passed one hand over his forehead. He was still ghastly white and the lines in his face deepened. He looked ten years older since Billie last saw him that afternoon.

"I'm not feeling very good," he said faintly. "I wanted to be here early to-night to try my luck again. But I was held up. I was just telling Billie. I've been in a fight. Yes—I want to play!" Trying to rise he added fiercely: "I must play to get some of my money back." But the effort was too much for him, and he sat down again.

"You're sick, man!" exclaimed Mansfield. "You ought to go home."

"Sick nothing," replied Forrester testily. "I'll be all right presently when this dope has worn off. I can't go home till I've busted your bank—do you hear, Joe? Not till I've got back every cent you owe me and more besides. I'll be all right presently. It isn't that which bothers me."

"What is it, then?" demanded the gambler mystified. "Hard up? Your credit's still good. I can let you have a few hundred."

Forrester smiled grimly, and then broke out into a strange, hollow, haunting laugh. Shaking his head he replied:

"It isn't money either. I've plenty. See!"

He drew from his pocket a thick wad of yellow-

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backed bills. There were twenties, fifties, hundreds—about \$2,000. Billie opened his eyes and stared. When he left Forrester at five o'clock he was stone broke.

"Well, what is the matter with you?" demanded Mansfield puzzled. "You look sick."

"I've been in a fight, I tell you," repeated Forrester with growing irritation. "A man can't look well when he's been doped by thugs."

"Fight!" said Mansfield incredulously. "What fight?"

Forrester passed his hand wearily over his head, as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"I had to see a man downtown. I left him at eight o'clock to come here. As I passed through Washington Square I stopped in a little joint for a drink. Two men sat down at my table. One, a Tenderloin gambler named Barnes, I had met before. The other was a stranger. We got talking and matching pennies. I flashed my roll when I paid for the drinks and Barnes saw it. He suggested throwing dice for fifty dollars a throw, and called for more drinks. They must have doped my glass, for I've felt dazed and dizzy ever since. My head burns as if it were in a red hot vice. I won \$800 and quit. Barnes, a big husky fellow, got nasty. I paid for the drinks and left the place. They followed me out and I recrossed Washington Square. In the shadow of the arch they attacked me. The weather was foggy and no one was about. The big fellow hit me in the face, making my nose bleed. I knocked him down, and kicked the other thug in the stomach. They

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came after me again. I pulled my revolver, shot twice and ran. I don't know if I hit them. When I reached Fifth Avenue, I stumbled, and fell on a bench unconscious. Either the blow on the head or the stuff I drank did me up. When I came to, a policeman was hitting my legs with his billy and a clock was striking one. I hailed a cab and came right up here."

"Quite a yarn!" laughed Mansfield. "You got their dough. That's the main thing."

Staggering to his feet and leaning heavily on Billie's arm, Forrester said:

"Yes, I've got it, Joe Mansfield—and don't think you're going to get it. My luck's turned I tell you. I'm going to win and win till I've broken your bank."

"All right, my boy—win all you like. What you can get away with you're welcome to. It'll all come back in the end."

Forrester was feeling better. He rose and accompanied by Billie, entered the rooms and proceeded to the faro table. As the crowd of players saw him approach, there were audible whispers. Recognizing a master, one who had won his title as a daring player, they immediately opened their serried ranks to let the newcomer take a seat at the table. The news spread like wild fire through the rooms that Bob Forrester, the plunger, had come, and men came hurrying from the other tables in the expectation of seeing sensational play. Had he not already made a record for continuous high play at faro? One night he sat in at the same table and for forty-eight hours,

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with the exception of a single deal, he battled copper on and copper off with the Goddess of Chance. The high play attracted an enormous crowd round the faro bank table, yet amid the general excitement he was the coolest of all. His play consisted in betting \$5,000 on doubles and \$3,000 on the cases. At one time he was \$100,000 winner. Then luck went against him and he lost steadily until he was \$50,000 out. Once more the tide turned in his favor, and he kept piling up his winnings until at last when he was too exhausted to keep track of his bets, and all the dealers and look-outs were about to drop from exhaustion, he cashed in \$30,000 winner.

Would he repeat the coup to-night? All watched breathlessly as, after taking a stack of chips, he placed \$50 on the king. With exasperating slowness the dealer shoved the card out of the box, disclosing a three of spades. The next card was a ten of diamonds. The dealer pushed this out and a five of clubs was revealed, after which came the king of hearts. Forrester had lost. As indifferent, apparently as if playing with dimes, Forrester now doubled his stakes, betting \$100 by coppering the queen. The queen soon came out, but to win. He had lost again. At once he placed \$300 on the ace. The ace of clubs appeared, but to lose. A murmur ran through the crowd of onlookers. Bob Forrester's run of ill luck was still sticking to him.

Like most gamblers, Forrester was superstitious. Rising abruptly from the table, he said to Billie:

"It's no use. Faro's against me to-night. If I

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sit here I'll lose every cent I have. I feel it. I'll try the wheel."

Leaving the faro lay-out, he passed into the next room, followed by almost the entire crowd. It reminded Billie of the betting ring at the race track, where the mob runs at the heels of a successful plunger to see how he places his money.

"Make your bets, gentlemen!"

The strident, colorless voice of the croupier again invited the players to place their stakes.

Forrester took a stack of chips and just as the ball was beginning to slacken speed quickly placed \$10 on the "18."

There was dead silence and a hundred eyes were riveted on the little ball as it fell with a click into one of the sockets.

"Eighteen—red and even!" announced the croupier in a tone of complete indifference. After drawing in the losses with his rake he handed a stack of yellow chips to Forrester, who had won thirty-two times his stake, or \$320. The onlookers nudged each other, while Billie chuckled. Forrester alone remained passive.

Was the wheel for him, after all? he thought to himself. Did these imbeciles standing around enjoying the sport realize that he, poor devil, was playing for his very life?

"Make your bets, gentlemen!"

Once more the wheel was revolving, and the tiny ball sent spinning. Forrester hesitated for a moment,

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and then taking the whole of the \$320 he had just won placed it all on the "3."

The ball gradually slowed up, and the onlookers held their breath.

"Three—red and odd."

He had won again—over ten thousand dollars!

This was sensational enough to please everybody, and the other tables were quickly deserted, all crowding round the lucky Forrester. In the general excitement he alone remained cool and self-possessed, calmly piling up his chips, quietly studying the placing of new bets. Mr. Mansfield, attracted by the commotion, came up and stood by the side of the croupier, watching the game. As the banker paid over the winnings he glanced significantly at his employer, as if asking if he should go on playing or declare the bank broken. Mansfield smiled grimly and shook his head.

"Go on," he muttered. "Give him all he wants. It'll all come back."

"Make your bets, gentlemen!"

The little ball once more went rolling on its journey. Forrester felt that the psychological moment had come. His luck could not last. He had won three times running. The chances of any single number he might select turning up again were overwhelmingly against him. He would bet only on the color and stake all he had.

Billie, nervous and flushed, was standing at his elbow, urging him to stop now, and be content with his winnings. Forrester shook his head.

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"It's all or nothing, Billie!"

Taking all his chips and adding to the pile a big roll of bills from his pockets, he pushed the whole mass over on to the red. Then looking up at Mansfield, he said:

"Double or nothing, Joe. Twelve thousand on the red. Does it go?"

The croupier hesitated. The spectators gasped. Mansfield nodded acquiescence.

The croupier gave the wheel a quick twist and immediately a deep silence fell over the entire room. The suspense was so tense that one could hear the men breathe. Some gasped from sheer nervous excitement. The convulsive twitching of Forrester's fingers alone betrayed the fact that he was interested.

Amid the unnatural silence the rattle of the ball, as it gradually lost its momentum, sounded like a volley of musketry. It reminded Forrester of the rattle one hears in the throat of the dying. Yet a mysterious voice was whispering in his ear that he was going to win—that fortune again would smile on him. Suddenly there was a click. Despite his outward indifference his blood turned cold, his heart seemed to stand still. The crowd of spectators, besides themselves with excitement, craned their necks forward.

"Thirty—red and even!" announced the croupier calmly. It was not his money, so he did not care one way or the other. But Mansfield winced. He made a sign to the banker, who stepped down from his seat and announced in a loud voice, dominating the storm

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of congratulations which showered upon the fortunate player :

"Gentlemen, the wheel is closed for the night!"

Forrester had broken the bank.

Billie Willets and his other friends crowded round, while, flushed from his victory, Forrester sat at the table counting the stacks of chips that he was about to cash in.

Joe Mansfield, unruffled, took his loss stoically, like the gambler he was. He stood chatting and jesting with a group of patrons who were saying good-night.

"I'm glad to see Forrester get the money," he said good-humoredly, as if losing \$24,000 was the merest bagatelle. "He's been down on his luck lately. This will put him on his feet again."

Suddenly an anxious look came over the gambler's face. He had just seen Campbell re-enter the rooms. Leaving the group he went up to him:

"Back again, eh, Campbell?"

"Yes," replied the detective. "I've been all over New York after the man I want, and the trail leads right here. There's no mistake this time. He's here all right. You've heard the news, of course."

"No," replied the gambler indifferently, "what news?"

"There's been a sensational murder. It'll be all over town soon. The morning newspapers are already out with big scare heads."

"What is it?" asked Mansfield, his curiosity now aroused.

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"Rich man murdered in his home—that's all," said the detective carelessly.

"Rich man—who?" demanded Mansfield. There was a possibility that it might be one of his patrons who owed him money, and as gamblers' debts cannot be claimed legally this would be bad news.

"John Forrester—the big dry goods man, of Forrester & Co."

"What!" exclaimed Mansfield, starting back in amazement. "You don't mean Bob Forrester's uncle?"

"The same," replied the sleuth laconically.

The gambler was so astounded by the news that for a few moments he was deprived of speech. When he had somewhat recovered, he asked:

"What was the motive—who did it? Is there any clue?"

"Yes," answered Campbell significantly. "The clue is hot. I'm going to make an arrest now."

"You said the trail led here. Do you mean to say that the murderer is under my roof at this very moment?"

The detective nodded.

"I'm sorry to make a fuss here, Mr. Mansfield. You've been very good to us boys, and I've no wish to cause you any unpleasantness. But duty's duty, you know. Anyway, it doesn't reflect on you any way. He's only one of your patrons."

"One of my patrons!" gasped Mansfield.

Consternation was written all over the gambler's

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face. One of his patrons arrested in his house on a murder charge! The publicity and scandal would do him irreparable damage. Nervously he said:

"Can't you follow him—whoever he is—and make the arrest elsewhere? It's worth fifty dollars to me," he added in a whisper.

The detective shook his head.

"No, sir. There's bunch of reporters on the job. They're down on the street now watching the house, waiting for me to bring him out."

"Whom do you suspect? Whom does your warrant call for?"

The detective made no reply, but walked away in the direction of the roulette table where Forrester, still surrounded by a crowd of enthusiastic pikers, was exchanging his chips for crisp bank-notes. Mr. Mansfield followed as if in a dream.

Campbell elbowed his way unceremoniously through the throng and thrusting aside Billie, who was helping to count the money, laid a hand on Forrester's shoulder. Thinking it was someone else come to congratulate him Forrester looked up, but seeing a stranger was quick to resent the familiarity.

"What do you want? Who are you?" he demanded curtly.

"That's my name," said the detective quietly displaying his shield. "You've won enough for to-night, Mr. Bob Forrester. I want you to come with me. Put that dough in your pocket. The captain wants to have a word with you at the station house."

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Billie stopped counting and stared, the bystanders whispered one to the other and Forrester half rose from his chair. The flush that had overspread his face during the excitement of the play had again been succeeded by a deathly pallor. The detective's hand was still on his shoulder, and it did not escape the notice of those present that it was a professional grip. All looked at each other with stupefaction.

"Your captain wants to see me?" stammered Forrester. "What for?" he demanded. "There must be some mistake."

Billie could not contain himself from indignation.

"It's some stupid blunder!" he cried. "The police are always making some asinine break. Take your hand off my friend this instant. Why don't you knock him down, Forrester?"

The detective took a firmer hold.

"Come—I can't waste time chinning," he said sternly. "You're under arrest. You had better come quietly."

"Under arrest!" faltered Forrester. "On what charge?"

There was a pause. All looked towards Campbell who, slowly, as if to give his words more dramatic effect, answered:

"On the charge of having murdered your uncle, John Forrester!"

The gambler started to his feet, upsetting his chair and scattering the money all over the floor. His face grew ashen white, and he seemed about to collapse.

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He would have fallen if Billie had not supported him. Weakly, he exclaimed:

"Mr. Forrester murdered, and they want me? Are you sure there is not some mistake? Why do they want me?"

"It's an outrage!" cried Billie.

The spectators were too much surprised to utter a word. They simply stared.

The detective made a move towards the staircase.

"Come, I can't waste any more time. They'll tell you all about it at the station."

Forrester said nothing. His first movement of surprise over, he pulled himself together, left to Billie the task of picking up the money that was scattered all over the floor, and giving Mansfield a silent hand grip, followed the detective out.

CHAPTER X

THE Forrester murder created a profound stir throughout the United States. In New York and vicinity little else occupied public attention. The prominence of the victim, the esteem in which the merchant was held and the peculiarly atrocious manner of his death, at once classed it as one of the most sensational and mysterious cases known in the blood-stained chronicles of crime. On the morning that the startling news was made known, the murder was the one topic of conversation everywhere. Total strangers discussed it in street cars and elevated trains, business men talked about it in their offices. It was the sole subject of interest at every breakfast table.

The crime was discovered just before midnight on Wednesday, December 26th, too late to permit of full details being given in the early editions of the morning newspapers. But the *Chronicle* had this brief account of the tragedy, which had shocked the whole community:

“Last night, John Forrester, the well-known merchant, was murdered in his residence, No. ——— Second avenue. The unfortunate man was found lying in a pool of blood on the floor of his library, and a hasty examination of the body showed that he had received two bullet wounds in the head, each one of

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which might have caused his death. Robbery seems to have been the only motive for the crime. The disorder in which the room was found—chairs upset, portières torn and blood-stained—shows that a terrific struggle had taken place before the venerable merchant succumbed to the attack of his assassin. The safe, in which he was known to have \$150,000 worth of gilt-edge bonds and a large sum in currency, was open and emptied of its contents.

“The body was discovered by Luke Deans, Mr. Forrester’s man servant, and policeman James Lynch, of the Nineteenth precinct. The man servant Deans is under arrest. Just as this edition of the *Chronicle* went to press, Mr. Richard Bryce, the deceased merchant’s attorney, reached the Forrester residence, having been sent for by the police. As Mr. Bryce was the last person, with the exception of the murderer, to see the merchant alive, the police believe that he may be able to furnish an important clue.”

The above was all the information at first available. A later edition of the same paper, however, contained these further details:

“The interest in the Forrester murder grows with each hour. The tragedy has shocked the entire community, and startling and unlooked-for developments may be expected. The declaration of Mr. Richard Bryce, the deceased merchant’s attorney, proved to be of the utmost importance, and it is believed will lead

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to the prompt solution of one of the most brutal and mysterious murders of recent times. The first thing the police do in cases of this kind is to ascertain the motive. As far as was known, the victim had not an enemy in the world, and it was at first believed that robbery was the only incentive to the crime. Mr. Bryce, however, has been able to furnish a clue that is likely to result any moment in a most sensational arrest.

"Telephoned for by the police immediately after the discovery of the crime Mr. Bryce arrived at the Forrester residence shortly after midnight, and when shown the blood-stained body of his old friend, whom he had left only an hour or so before in perfect health, he was inexpressibly shocked, and for several minutes was too overcome to give the police any information. Then he gave these particulars:

"Last week Mr. Forrester called on him at his law office down town. The purpose of this visit was to have a new will drawn up. The merchant made known his wishes and the rough draft of a will was prepared. It was then arranged that Mr. Bryce should take the new will, to be signed, to Mr. Forrester's residence on Wednesday evening. Punctual to this appointment, Mr. Bryce went to the Forrester residence early last evening, and the new will was duly executed, in presence of Luke Deans, the merchant's man servant. Having disposed of the business transaction, Mr. Bryce was invited by Mr. Forrester to stay and play a game of chess. The old gentleman was in the best of spirits, as if the signing of the new will had removed a burden

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from his mind, and proved an amiable host. The cook retired to bed at nine o'clock, complaining of feeling indisposed. Deans, the man servant, went out directly after dinner and had not yet returned at ten o'clock when Mr. Bryce said good-night to Mr. Forrester and went home. He let himself out alone and particularly remembered slamming the door behind him.

"This statement tallied in every particular with that of Luke Deans, the man servant. According to the account the latter gave to the police, he returned home at eleven o'clock. He was certain as to the hour because he remembered hearing a clock strike, and he counted the strokes. Having been in Mr. Forrester's service many years, the merchant trusted him with a latch key. He drew out his key preparatory to letting himself in when, to his astonishment, he found the front door open. The house being all dark, and the light in Mr. Forrester's bedroom extinguished, he knew that Mr. Bryce had gone home and that everybody had retired. He at once concluded that a burglar had forced an entrance and had left the door open as a means of escape in case of alarm. Afraid to tackle the intruder single-handed, he ran to the corner of Twenty-first street and called a policeman, who returned with him to the house. They entered together and searched the premises without seeing anybody or discovering anything unusual. Convinced that he was mistaken, Deans was just dismissing the officer when he noticed a light in his master's library, one flight up, on the second floor. The door was

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closed, but the light could be seen through the cracks. It was so unusual for Mr. Forrester to leave a light in the library after he had extinguished it in the bedroom, with which room it communicated, that once more the servant's suspicions were aroused. Accompanied by the policeman he went upstairs and knocked. Receiving no reply, he opened the door, when both men were confronted by a shocking spectacle. Mr. Forrester, fully dressed, was lying motionless on the floor, while the carpet all around was saturated with the blood that had flowed from two bullet wounds, one in the back of his head, the other at the temple. All around the room was unmistakable evidence of a desperate struggle—chairs were upset, portières torn, decanter and glasses broken. The motive for the crime was very plain. The large safe, in which Mr. Forrester kept a large part of his fortune, in negotiable securities and currency, was found entirely empty, save of a few papers of minor importance.

“Mr. Bryce asked the coroner's permission to examine the papers left in the safe. The lawyer declared that if allowed to make this inspection, he thought he could give such information as would lead to the arrest of the murderer within a few hours. Permission was given and the papers examined in the presence of the coroner. Lawyer Bryce sought in vain for a certain paper which, he declared, ought to be there, and convinced finally that the assassin had taken it, together with the bonds and other negotiable securities, he said that his suspicions were correct, and

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at once went into private conference with Captain Burns of the detective bureau. They were closeted in a room for several minutes when Mr. Bryce was heard to exclaim: 'Take my word for it. You don't have to look any further. He is your man.' Almost immediately, Detective Campbell, armed with a John Doe warrant, left to scour the Tenderloin gambling houses in search of a man suspected of the murder. Up to the moment of going to press no arrest had yet been made."

At seven o'clock that morning, punctual to his appointment with Creston Trehern, Steve Marston sat in the dingy ferry house at the foot of Christopher street, reading the newspaper, while waiting for his friend's appearance with the valise. He went carefully through the account of the murder, and when he had finished, whistled softly to himself. He had no doubt whatever that the Mr. Forrester of the newspaper story and the old gentleman with the bonds, of whom Trehern had spoken, were one and the same person, and the opinion he had previously held of his associate's skill as a cracksman rose proportionately.

"Well, I'm d—d!" he chuckled to himself. "He's pulled it off, all right. Who'd have thought he'd risk the chair to get the stuff. I knew Trehern was a pretty smooth guy, but I didn't give him credit for so much nerve. I suppose the old party put up a fight, and he had to quiet him. Anyhow, it's done. The thing now is to get away safely with the goods."

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As he idly watched the swarms of suburbanites—clerks, shop girls, stenographers—vomited forth in thousands by each arriving ferry boat, hurrying past him on their way to work, he began to weigh the chances of disposing of the bonds. To realize on them immediately was out of the question. The hue and cry was already raised. The whole country would soon be ringing with the affair. Every banker and broker would be on the lookout for the stolen securities. The slightest attempt to negotiate them would be dangerous in the extreme. The only sensible course was to lay low until the thing had blown over, and then get rid of them one at a time in some other city. There was no hurry. Trehern must have secured several thousand dollars in currency, enough to keep them in clover for some time. Entirely satisfied with his share in the deal, considering himself lucky to be a partner in it at all, he rose and paced the floor, impatiently watching for the coming of Trehern. Presently his anxious vigil was rewarded. He saw Trehern getting off a car, valise in hand. Apprehensive that a detective might be shadowing his associate, Marston waited until he entered the ferry house, and then quietly approached him.

"Here I am," he whispered. "You'd better slip me the valise. You may be watched!"

"Watched be d—d!" exclaimed Trehern in a tone of utter disgust. He tossed the valise, which, judging by its lightness, was apparently empty, onto a seat, and with a gesture of disappointment, sat down beside it.

"What's wrong?" ejaculated Marston in surprise.

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"Wrong?" laughed Trehern mockingly. "Nothing doing, that's all."

"What?" cried Marston in consternation. "Didn't you get away with it?"

"Get away with nothing!" growled Trehern.

Marston almost choked from amazement. Speechless, he looked from Trehern to the story of the murder contained in the newspaper he held in his hand.

"Do you mean to say it wasn't you who shot this old man, and got away with \$200,000 worth of bonds and money?"

Trehern shook his head in a dejected kind of way.

"It wasn't me," he replied surlily. "I didn't get even a smell at the money. Some other fellow was wise to the game and had made a neat job of it before I got there. He went further than I intended to go, for he killed the old man. If he's caught, it's the chair for him, that's sure! Serve him right, too. But he got away with the swag, all right."

"Who pulled it off, do you suppose?"

"I've no idea. Some guy who knew the bonds were kept in the house."

"Who told you about the bonds?"

"I was playing poker with Bob Forrester. You know Bob—he's a sort of nephew of the old man. They had had a row and Forrester senior, refused to have anything further to do with Bob. He happened to speak of the old man's habit of keeping the money and securities in the house. I needed the cash, and there you have it."

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"When you got to the house, it was all over?"

"I got there at ten minutes to eleven. The house was dark, and I went up the stoop intending to force an entrance through the parlor window. To my surprise, I saw that the front door was open. I naturally supposed that the servants had accidentally left it so, and congratulating myself on the trouble it saved me I entered the hall. The house was dark. There was nothing worth stopping for on the ground floor. I went upstairs. On the second floor I saw a light under a door. I crept cautiously up to it and listened. Not a sound. Noiselessly, I turned the handle and looked in. Imagine my amazement when I saw an old man lying on the floor covered with blood, the furniture and papers scattered all over the room and the large safe wide open. For a moment I was so startled that my knees shook. I felt my hair stand on end. Then I realized that someone had been there before me. I went to the safe. It was empty. To remain an instant longer was dangerous. If found, I should be suspected of the murder, and any moment someone might come in. So I quickly made my way downstairs and out into the street again, leaving the front door open as before. As I turned the corner of the next street I saw someone going up the stoop. I had a narrow escape."

"If that don't beat anything I ever heard of!" exclaimed Marston. "And here was I calculating what we'd do with the stuff."

"Case of counting chickens before they're hatched, I guess," said Trehern dryly. "Never mind, Phil, old

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boy. You and I will get together on some good thing before long. Meantime, I must be going. I only came here to let you know it was a throw down."

The crowds of commuters were still pouring in from New Jersey, men and women elbowing and jostling in their hurry to reach their places of employment. All of them carried newspapers in their hands and many were discussing in loud tones the details of the Forrester murder. Trehern had picked up his valise and was about to board a car when two newsboys, carrying stacks of paper fresh from the press, ran into the ferry house crying:

"Extra! Extra! Special Extra! Arrest of the murderer! Extra!"

People ran from all directions and snatched copies of the newspaper, the ink on which was not yet dry. Trehern was among the first to secure a copy. He and Marston could scarcely contain their eagerness. Trehern unfolded the paper, and they read in big, bold letters stretching all the way across the page:

MERCHANT'S NEPHEW ARRESTED!

Trehern almost let the newspaper fall out of his hands.

"Bob!" he ejaculated.

"I'm not surprised," said Marston quietly. "When you said that he spoke to you about the bonds and then told me about the row with the old man, I thought he might have had a hand in it."

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"Bob Forrester!" exclaimed Trehern, who could not get over his surprise. "Well—well! Who would have thought he would go that far! Still," he ruminated, "now I think of it, he spoke very bitterly about the old man. He showed me a letter in which the uncle cut him off with a pittance. There was a new will, too, which he could easily destroy. The money was his, anyway. He only took it to make it look like a robbery. Yes, it's up to him, all right. It's plain enough, now."

Marston meantime had taken the newspaper and read as follows:

"On information furnished to the police by Mr. Richard Bryce, a warrant was issued late last night for Robert Forrester, the murdered man's nephew. The young man was arrested at an early hour this morning, in Joe Mansfield's palatial gambling house at No. — West Thirty-seventh street, just after he had won a large sum of money at roulette. He was taken to the Twenty-third street police station, and will be arraigned in the Jefferson Market Court this morning.

"The police are confident that the nephew can clear up the mystery, a number of suspicious circumstances connecting him with the crime. They declare that not only is there a strong motive, but that the young man was in desperate straits. He had just had a violent quarrel with his uncle, who had made a new will disinheriting him. His reputation has not been of the best. For some years he has been a conspicuous figure in the fast resorts of the White Light district, where he was known as a reckless gambler. Some time ago

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he beat the record at Mansfield's gambling house for continuous play at faro, quitting a heavy winner. Of late, however, luck has been against him, creditors have been pressing him hard, and he is known to be in serious financial difficulties. He took his arrest calmly, and has refused to make any statement."

"It's Bob, all right!" said Trehern when he had read it all through. "I owe him a grudge for the way he treated me at his flat, but I don't bear malice. I'm sorry to see him in such a mess."

"We'd better separate and be off," whispered Marston uneasily. "There's a plain clothes man over there. I recognize him. He doesn't know me, but he suspects we are up to something. Good-bye. Let me know when anything's doing."

He walked leisurely away while Trehern strolled off in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER XI

AS arranged the night before, Vivie and Virginia spent Wednesday evening at the Opera. It was a gala night, "Faust" being the bill, with a star cast. The splendid opera house was crowded to the doors, and the huge auditorium, with its rich red and gold furnishings, its every seat filled with fashion, wealth and beauty, presented a spectacle of extraordinary brilliancy. Signor Bentoni and Harry Graham were also of the party. Both men disliked each other cordially, feeling instinctively that they were rivals for the same woman's favor. Graham well knew that as far as he himself was concerned Virginia would never recall what she had said. She liked him, but beyond that there was no hope. They had formed an alliance of friendship, and with that he was reconciled to be content. But as the foolish moth flutters around the flame, he still sought her society, and it irritated him to observe how much greater was her interest in the Italian's conversation than in his. If not blinded by jealousy, he would have realized that this was only reasonable since the artist was able to talk to her about pictures and painting, giving her a glimpse of that artistic life abroad which she was eager to see, and much other information that would be highly valuable in view of her coming trip to Europe.

Signor Bentoni was not slow to notice the discom-

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future of his American rival, and while he understood the real cause of Virginia's interest in him, he was quite willing to credit it to his own irresistible magnetism. Like many foreigners, he had formed a low standard of women's morals, he regarded every one as his natural prey. He was conceited enough to believe that he had fascinated this attractive American girl, and he was quite ready, should opportunity arise, to take advantage of his good fortune, no matter how it might compromise her. Virginia, meantime, was wholly unconscious of what was passing in his mind. She gave him no more thought than any other man, enjoying his company and conversation simply because it was novel and because he was of that art world to which she also wanted to belong. As he bent over her in the box, in his spotless evening attire, with his pointed Van Dyke beard, large flashing eyes, white teeth and amiable smile, his European polish and easy grace, she could not help thinking how much he resembled certain pictures she had seen of Mephistopheles, and the idea struck her as being so droll that she burst into a laugh that nobody understood but herself.

Graham, taking her merriment for proof that she was enjoying the Italian's society, ground his teeth with rage, and paid more attention to Vivie who, dead to everything not operatic, was intent on what was passing on the stage, eagerly drinking in every note of Gounod's beautiful music, dreaming of the day when she, herself, would make her *début* as Marguerite

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and, attired as a German maiden with flaxen braids, sit at the spinning-wheel singing dolefully of the sorrows of the King of Thule. It was not often that she had such an opportunity to study at close range the stage "business" and the methods of the famous singers. Music was her vocation, and she was passionately fond of grand opera. If she had her way the Opera would see her every night, but Mr. Bryce, engrossed in business all day, did not like going out at night, and as she could not go alone she seldom went at all.

They stayed until the last act and as, after the performance, Mr. Townsend suggested going to Sherry's for supper, it was after midnight when the Townsend carriage deposited Vivie at her door. When she stepped from the smart brougham to the sidewalk, she was astonished to see the lights burning brightly throughout the house, as if the entire household were aroused. Her uncle usually sat up when she went out, but this general illumination and wakefulness was extraordinary, and at once made her apprehensive. The Townsends, too, were surprised and insisted on letting the carriage wait until investigation had been made. A glance at the face of the servant confirmed the impression that something was wrong.

"Where's my uncle?" demanded Vivie, now thoroughly alarmed.

"He's gone out, Miss," answered the girl.

"Gone out, at this hour? Where has he gone?"

"The master's gone to Mr. Forrester's house, Miss.

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They telephoned for him fifteen minutes ago. Mr. Bryce woke Lizzie and me and told us to wait up for you. Master said you was not to worry. He'd be home soon."

"This is most extraordinary!" exclaimed Vivie, turning to Mr. Townsend and Virginia, who had accompanied her up the stoop. "What can have happened? Mr. Forrester must be ill."

Her anxiety was so apparent that Virginia at once volunteered to stay with her all night. Vivie gladly accepted, for this sudden summons had made her exceedingly nervous, and she had all kinds of dismal forebodings. So Mr. and Mrs. Townsend drove off, leaving the two girls together. They had scarcely removed their wraps when the telephone bell rang. Guessing that it was her uncle, Vivie flew to the receiver.

It was Mr. Bryce, as she surmised. Briefly, and in broken sentences, he told her of the tragedy which he said had come upon him with startling suddenness. He was too much upset by the shocking affair to give any details, he was now helping the police to unravel the mystery, and it would keep him at the Forrester home the best part of the night. Yes, the murderer was known—at least suspicions that amounted almost to certainty, pointed to one man, the only man in the world who was interested in Mr. Forrester's death. Couldn't she guess who it was? Acting on this suspicion the police were about to make an important arrest.

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Vivie let the receiver drop from her trembling hands.

"Good God!" she exclaimed, horrified.

"What?" cried Virginia startled.

"Something terrible has happened," she said in an awe-stricken whisper.

"To Mr. Forrester?" demanded Virginia.

Vivie nodded, not trusting herself to speak, half hysterical.

"It's too shocking! He's been murdered!"

"Murdered!" gasped Virginia, hardly crediting her ears.

Consternation was on both girls' faces. Mr. Forrester, that sweet, lovable, estimable man—murdered! It was too horrible to believe. Such a revolting crime makes one shudder, even when only an unknown person is concerned. At such moments of general excitement and indignation, the ordinary conventions of life are scattered to the winds, a suddenly awakened public sympathy draws everybody together in a bond of common fellowship, stranger accosts stranger in the streets, loudly expressing horror of the cowardly deed and invoking the vengeance of society upon the murderer. How much more shocking is the tragedy when it involves anyone with whom one has been on terms of intimacy!

Both girls were too excited to think of going to bed. Sleep was out of the question. Vivie insisted on Virginia taking some rest, but in vain. Both could think and talk of nothing but the terrible news. Who had done it? What was the motive?

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Vivie recalled her uncle's words: "Suspicion points only in one direction—to the man who was directly interested in Mr. Forrester's death."

"Who can that be?" asked Virginia. Then, as if light suddenly broke in upon her, she stammered: "Surely not——"

"Yes," said Vivie firmly, "that worthless nephew, Robert Forrester. He is quite capable of it. Shocking as such an accusation is, I shouldn't be at all surprised. My uncle evidently suspects him. He is probably the man they've gone to arrest."

"How awful!" exclaimed Virginia horror stricken.

Whatever sympathy she may have felt for this man when all had condemned him, disappeared like a flash at the revelation that he was a criminal. Out of a sheer love of argument she had seemed to espouse his cause, but now his name filled her with terror. If it were true that he had killed his benefactor, stricken the hand that fed him, she would always reproach herself for having given such an unnatural monster a single moment's consideration. There could be nothing but loathing in any decent man or woman's heart for such a murderer and the sooner the law disposed of him the better.

Vivie, flushed and nervous, paced the room, going from the window to the top of the stairs, straining her ears, expecting each moment to hear her uncle's familiar step. An hour, two hours passed, and still he did not come. Weary of talking about the case, the girls were now silent. They had discussed it until they

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were weary, exhausting every theory, following up every possible clue, their conclusions centering always on one man—Robert Forrester.

Virginia, tired out, was nodding in an arm chair. Vivie, her face pressed against the window pane, continued her anxious vigil. The big house was silent as the grave. Three o'clock struck, and then Vivie, realizing the uselessness of waiting any longer, aroused Virginia and insisted on her going to bed. Virginia protested, but Vivie agreed to go too, so in a few minutes the lights were out and the girls were asleep.

It was past nine when they awoke the next morning. Vivie's first inquiry was for her uncle, and when the maid told her Mr. Bryce had not come in all night she did not conceal her uneasiness. Virginia tried to reassure her:

"A case like that takes time," she said. "No doubt he couldn't get away. He's all right, of course. No news is good news."

They scanned the morning newspapers for further details, but the accounts were meagre. The papers spoke of an impending arrest, but there was no mention of the nephew. Perhaps Mr. Bryce's suspicions were wrong, after all.

"Let us hope so!" said Virginia. "That would be too revolting!"

At last, just as they were finishing breakfast they heard a noise in the outer hall which caused Vivie to jump up from the table.

"Uncle!" she cried, "where have you been?"

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Mr. Bryce sank exhausted into a chair. At first he did not notice Virginia.

"Virginia's here," said Vivie, drawing his attention to her presence. "They brought me home from the Opera last night and Virginia would not leave me alone when we heard the terrible news."

The lawyer muttered an apology.

"I'm glad you were with her, Miss Norman. It's been an awful night—awful!"

Virginia was startled when she saw the lawyer. His face was drawn and yellow as wax, and there were dark circles under his eyes, telling of lack of sleep. Vivie, too, was quick to notice his appearance.

"How you look, uncle!" she exclaimed. "Are you ill?"

"Tired out, that's all," replied the lawyer somewhat fretfully. More amiably he added: "It's been a terrible experience. I wouldn't care to go through it every day."

Vivie poured out a cup of coffee for him.

"You've done too much. You were compelled to, I know, but it would be serious if you were to make yourself ill. You know what the doctor said about your heart."

"Yes—yes, I know," replied Mr. Bryce as he sipped his coffee. "Any undue excitement might prove fatal. If I'm not dead after all I went through last night, I won't die in a hurry."

"It must have been a great shock to you," said Virginia.

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"It was," he answered. "When I got to the house and the police captain told me what had happened I nearly collapsed. I shook like a leaf. Yet I had to brace up and go through it all. I had to look at the mutilated body of my best friend; I had to examine his papers and attend to other grewsome details. I've been badgered by the coroner, the detectives, newspaper reporters, photographers. I haven't had a wink of sleep. Is it a wonder that I'm played out?"

"You shall go right up to bed now," declared Vivie. "But first tell us the latest news. Have they found out who did it? Is anyone under arrest?"

The lawyer drew a newspaper from his pocket, and handing it to his niece, said laconically:

"They've got him, all right. Read that."

Vivie hastily opened the paper while Virginia looked over her shoulder. As the girls caught sight of the heading both exclaimed at once:

"Robert Forrester!"

"What did I tell you over the 'phone last night?" said Mr. Bryce to his niece. "I knew he did it as soon as I heard of the affair. But when I reached the house and went over poor old Forrester's papers and saw what was missing—something in which no ordinary thief would have any possible interest—then I was positive that my suspicions were well founded. It was my information on this important point that led to his arrest."

"What was missing among the papers?" asked Virginia.

"The new will, that's all!" answered Mr. Bryce

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with a chuckle, as if not displeased that his sagacity had enabled the police to clear up the mystery. "It wasn't necessary to go any further. Robert Forrester knew that a new will disinheriting him had been drawn up; he knew that it was in the house; he knew also that it was his uncle's habit to keep negotiable bonds for a large amount in the safe—a dangerous practice against which I often warned the old man. The nephew was in desperate straits. He needed money, and he needed a large amount at once. Angered by the knowledge of this new will, he suddenly conceived the idea of stealing the bonds and destroying the will. He went to the house and confronted his uncle. They had words, and in a fit of rage he killed him. It's as clear as daylight."

Vivie had left the room to attend to household matters, and Virginia sat toying with the newspaper. After a silence, she said:

"Of course, what you advance is theory only. If the nephew is convicted, it will have to be on something more tangible than mere surmise. We know that he is a bad, unprincipled man, but that in itself does not brand him a murderer."

The lawyer put down his cup and stared at this girl who ventured to express an opinion.

"You appear to champion him," he said with a tinge of sarcasm. "You seem interested in this scoundrel. It's odd, but a bad man often has an unaccountable attraction for women, even good women. But my duty is to the dead man."

Virginia flushed. She felt the rebuke was merited.

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What right had she to put forward her own views in opposition to those of a man so much more experienced.

"You are mistaken, Mr. Bryce," said the girl with quiet dignity. "I have no interest in this man. I don't know him. I never saw him. I have never heard anything but bad about him. My only interest in the matter is a love for justice and fair play. The nephew, by his conduct, has prejudiced people against him, and when one is prejudiced one's judgment is apt to be at fault. Murder is an awful charge to fasten on any man. Just think a moment! Put yourself in his place. Suppose a web of circumstance entangled you as it has him, and directed suspicion to you. Just think what your feelings would be, to be confronted with these accusations, and yet to know in your own heart that you were innocent!"

The lawyer was silent for a moment, his cold gray eyes looking searchingly into the girl's, as if he were trying to read her inmost thoughts. Her eyes met his and quickly he looked away. Speaking slowly and deliberately, as if he wished each word to count, he said:

"Miss Norman, your sympathy proves you have a good heart, but in this case your sympathy is wasted. I am a lawyer, accustomed to weigh evidence. I don't have to await the judgment of the courts to make up my opinion. There are certain aspects of this case with which you are not acquainted, but which I know only too well, and which convince me that Robert Forrester killed his benefactor. The police are in

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possession of these proofs. No sane person, knowing the facts, can doubt for a moment that he is the man. He is guilty as hell!" He checked himself, feeling that he had expressed himself too forcibly. "Excuse me," Miss Norman, "my feelings sometimes get the better of me. I can't think of that murderer and keep my blood cool. If you knew, as I do, all that Mr. Forrester did for that miserable scoundrel! And this is his reward—to be ruthlessly butchered. Was there ever an apter illustration of the fable of the farmer who rescued a frozen snake from cold and hunger only to be bitten to death when the creature had regained its strength? It is one of the most brutal, cold-blooded, unnatural crimes that I ever heard of in the whole course of my legal career. All I hope is that there will be a speedy conviction, and that I shall have the satisfaction of living long enough to see Robert Forrester go to the electric chair."

"It is very shocking," said Virginia. "Let us hope he can prove his innocence."

The lawyer began to lose patience.

"My dear young lady, how can he prove it? Everything points to his guilt. His confused manner when arrested last night at the gambling house, his late appearance at Mansfield's when they expected him early, his inability to account plausibly for his tardy arrival. What is more, I happen to know that he had a key to the Forrester house, for he never surrendered the latch key given him when he lived with his uncle. My theory is this: He made up his mind to go to Mr. Forrester and protest against the new will

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and incidentally try and borrow more money. He probably watched me leave and surprised the old gentleman alone. His uncle was greatly incensed against him, words no doubt followed and Robert, who has an ungovernable and dangerous temper, lost his head, and in a frenzy pulled his pistol and fired the shots that killed the old man. He couldn't recall what he had done, so he resolved to get what benefit out of it that he could. He took all the bonds and money that were in the safe, and he also searched for the will and found it. Yesterday afternoon, before the murder, Forrester had no money, yet at midnight he turns up at the gambling house in a very agitated state and displays several thousand dollars. Would you call that mere coincidence? Moreover, the police found on him a revolver, two chambers of which had recently been discharged. The dead man had two bullet holes in his head. Would you call that only a coincidence? No—there is no doubt possible. He is the guilty man.”

Refreshed by the cup of coffee, Mr. Bryce rose from the table, and asking Virginia to excuse him, said he would go upstairs and take a nap. As he left the room the front door bell rang, and the next instant Vivie re-entered the breakfast room with Harry Graham. He was surprised to see Virginia, but quickly understood the reason of her presence.

“You’ve heard the news, of course,” was his first greeting.

“Yes—isn’t it horrible?” said Virginia. “We were just discussing it with Mr. Bryce. The poor man is

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completely exhausted. What do people say? Do they think Robert Forrester did it?"

"Think he did it?" echoed Graham, looking at Virginia in amazement, as if wondering how anyone could have any other opinion. "Of course they think he did it. Everyone is convinced of his guilt. The circumstantial evidence is so strong that he was at once committed to the Tombs without bail. The coroner's jury is certain to hold him for the grand jury. There's only one man I met to-day who thinks he's innocent, and he's only half a man."

"Who's that?" asked Vivie laughing.

"Why, that lobster Billie Willets! It's perfectly grotesque how he stands up for that blackguard. He insists that his precious friend Bob Forrester is an unfortunate victim of circumstances and will have no difficulty in proving his innocence. The prisoner, it appears, has engaged one of the biggest lawyers in town, and is going to brazen it out."

Turning to Vivie, he changed the topic, and went on:

"But I didn't come here this morning to talk of that murderer. I have a piece of news that will interest you."

"What may that be?" demanded Vivie with languid curiosity.

"I sail for Paris next week," smiled Graham, his face beaming. "My governor has consented. I'm to study architecture in the foreign schools for a year. I knew that you would be glad," he went on. "If you two go abroad this spring it'll be awfully jolly. I can be of assistance to you both. It's not easy for girls to

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get about alone. I may be able to help you secure an engagement at one of the opera houses, and, of course, I can be useful to Miss Norman in getting her into Paris art circles."

Vivie clapped her hands with joy. In her enthusiastic outburst she nearly fell over Virginia, who was not less pleased.

This long planned trip to Europe had occupied both girls' thoughts for months, and to know that there would be in Paris a friend on whom they could rely at once removed the difficulties that had beset their going. Instantly, the tragedy that had engrossed their minds all night and all morning was forgotten, and their spirits rose as they chatted like two magpies, making fresh plans for the coming journey. All three were so much taken up, calculating dates, speculating where they would stop, how they would arrange each day's work, and a hundred other details, that they did not notice Mr. Bryce who, having slept for half an hour, re-entered the room.

"Dear me," he exclaimed, "how busy you all are. Still discussing the murder?"

"No, uncle," replied Vivie, her face flushed from excitement. "We're talking over something much more cheerful."

"What is that?" asked the lawyer, elevating his eyebrows.

"We're planning our trip to Paris. Mr. Graham goes next week to study there. Now there'll be someone to look after me, you can't object any longer. Virginia and I have decided to sail in May."

CHAPTER XII

THE police were as confident as Mr. Bryce that they held the right man and public opinion generally endorsed their verdict. As the date for the coroner's inquest drew near everyone was sure that the nephew would be held for the grand jury. An indictment would speedily be found and this would be followed by one of the most sensational murder trials ever held in New York State.

Appearances were so overwhelmingly against the prisoner that even his friends shook their heads and looked grave when discussing the case. An atmosphere of gloom and sullen resentment hung over the White Light district, as if the gamblers, *roués*, and sporting fraternity in general realized that one of their guild had foolishly placed himself perilously near the electric chair and thrown an awkward searchlight upon the workings of the under world.

For the sensational press the case presented a golden opportunity. The yellow journals devoted pages to the murder in their morning and evening editions. From obscurity, Robert Forrester, *viveur* and gambler, suddenly became the most talked of man in the country. The newspapers were full of stories of his escapades and scandals in which he had figured. Large portraits, said to be his, yet each showing a different looking man, occupied a conspicuous place on the front page of

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every issue, and with these pictures were printed the most intimate details of his daily life in the Tombs prison—accounts of what he ate, how many cigars he smoked, what visitors he saw. Women reporters ecstatically described the magnetism of his eyes, while another wove a romance from the imprint of his thumbs. One newspaper bid a dollar a word for the complete story of his life as a gambler. A more enterprising contemporary, not to be out-done, offered him \$5,000 if he would describe with minute and gruesome details exactly how he killed his uncle.

While the community thus worked itself up into a fine frenzy, Forrester himself remained cool and unperturbed. The quality that made him a good gambler served him well at this crisis in his life. After the first shock, when Detective Campbell placed his hand on his shoulder in Mansfield's gambling house, he had regained his self possession and equanimity. To the police captain at the station house, after being warned that anything he might say would be used against him, he merely retorted:

"I know nothing about it. You have the wrong man."

No amount of questioning could get anything further from him. He lapsed into a sullen silence. When arraigned in the police court he was equally taciturn, adding merely that he would speak at the proper time. At the request of the district attorney he was committed to the Tombs without bail to await the coroner's inquest.

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Among the first to visit him in prison was Billie Willets, who still fumed and stormed at what he termed the imbecile stupidity of the police. A strange friendship had sprung up between this cynical man of the world, hardened in every vice, dead to every sincere sentiment, and the unsophisticated college boy, still full of life's enthusiasms and illusions. Billie tried to explain the incongruous association to his friends by insisting that Forrester had qualities which none but he recognized. He would have been nearer the truth if he admitted that it was a case of a weak mind being dominated by a stronger one. Moreover, there was a certain sense of obligation involved. He had never forgotten how one night in a Tenderloin joint, Forrester saved him from being robbed and assaulted by a gang of sharpers. That was the beginning of their acquaintance and Billie had not forgotten the service. Black as were appearances now, he was determined to stick to him. Not that he was quite sure that everything was as it ought to be. Much had to be explained—the blood on his clothes, the condition in which he turned up at the gambling house, his unaccountable possession of money, and the rather fishy story of the attack by thugs. Billie's face and manner plainly told that he realized the seriousness of his friend's position.

"This is a terrible business, Bob!" he said huskily.

Ignoring the outstretched hand, Forrester replied curtly:

"Why do you come, if it's so terrible? Did I send for you?"

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Accustomed as he was to the man's blunt manner of speaking, Billie hesitated.

"I thought I could help you," he stammered. "Of course, I don't believe you did it. Only——"

Forrester laughed mockingly.

"Only appearances are damnably against me, eh?"

Thus encouraged, Billie started impulsively forward and said earnestly:

"Yes, Bob, appearances are terribly against you. Even my faith in you was shaken last night when I recalled your long and unaccountable absence, your condition when you finally turned up, the blood stains on your clothes, the money in your possession——"

Forrester had risen, and was pacing the floor. The impatient shrugging of his shoulders and a rapid snapping of his fingers indicated his growing irritation. He stopped short and holding up his hand, fiercely burst out:

"Stop! Don't go any further. You are like all the rest—judging me, ready to condemn me unheard. I don't want help, I don't want your friendship. I can fight this thing out alone, and, by God, I will! You may go. Go, do you hear?"

He pointed towards the door.

Billie, disconcerted, not knowing what to do, no little intimidated by the gambler's choleric outburst, turned towards the entrance as if about to obey. As he did, Forrester sank down on a chair, his fierceness of manner gone, his face buried in his hands. This startled him more than anything else Forrester could

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do. That he should have lived to see the gambler show any kind of emotion seemed miraculous. Approaching him, he touched him on the shoulder. The gambler looked up awkwardly, as if ashamed of a momentary weakness. All anger had vanished from his face.

"Don't mind me, Billie," he said hoarsely. "I'm a brute. Nature made me that way, I reckon. Even the wild beasts must have a companion, someone they can trust and confide in, or they go mad. You're the only real friend I've got, boy. The others, Trehern, Mansfield and the rest desert a fellow at such times as these." Rising and holding out his hand he went on solemnly: "Billie, I'm what's called a bad man. I'm a common gambler, a spendthrift, N. G. generally. But I'm not crooked. I've played a straight game. As I expect one day to stand before my Maker and cash in my chips, I am innocent of that murder. Here is my hand. I wouldn't offer it to you if it were blood-stained."

"Show me how I can help you," answered Billie, grasping the proffered hand. "Something must be done at once!"

"I leave everything to Farrell, my lawyer. He has just been here," replied Forrester calmly. "I understand that Mr. Bryce is very active building up the case against me, prejudicing opinion, scraping together for the police all kinds of damning evidence, in a frantic effort to send me to the chair. He's wasting his time. We shall have no difficulty in proving an alibi. I wasn't within two miles of the scene of the murder. My witnesses will prove the truth of that,

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and when I leave the courtroom a free man I shall claim the estate, as heir under John Forrester's will."

"If we didn't do it, who did?" asked Billie in a feeble attempt at jocularity.

"I've no theory at present," answered Forrester. "I haven't had time to think. The happenings of the last two days, the shock of my arrest, having to face a horrible charge—all this has unstrung my nerves. Don't you suppose the news of the murder startled me more than it did anyone else? That old man was everything to me at one time!" Pausing for a moment, he added bitterly: "I repaid him well for all he did for me. He couldn't have been kinder to me when I was a boy if he had been my own father. For me to know that he died without forgiving me is the worst punishment Mr. Bryce or any of my other enemies can wish me."

He averted his head as if to conceal his emotion.

"Whoever killed him," persisted Billie, "knew that it was his custom to keep a large sum of money in the house."

"That's possible," answered Forrester.

He became suddenly silent, as if Billie's chance remark had opened up new channels of thought. Then, like a flash, he turned on Billie, startling that youth so that he nearly fell over.

"Have you seen Trehern lately?" he snapped.

"Yes—I saw him the other night at Mansfield's," answered Billie, wondering at the apparent irrelevancy of the question.

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"Seen him since?" asked Forrester in the same quick way.

"No—I went to his rooms to-day thinking I could get him to see some influential men in your behalf. They said he was out of town."

"He was at Mansfield's on the night of the murder?"

"Yes."

"Are you positive?" asked Forrester in a somewhat disappointed tone.

"I'm positive. I saw him sitting in a corner talking to that jailbird, Steve Marston."

"What time was that?"

"About nine o'clock."

"Did you see him after that?"

"No—I saw Marston standing at the tables, but he was alone. Trehern must have left early."

"Ah!" exclaimed Forrester eagerly. "So he was talking to Steve Marston, eh? They must have been up to mischief of some kind."

"Whatever it was," said Billie, "they wanted to keep it from me. They stopped talking as I came up and resumed in whispers as I walked away. But what do you care about them, what has that to do with your case?"

Forrester's face now was flushed, his breath came rapidly, and he paced nervously up and down the room, as if scarcely able to contain himself. Suddenly, he stopped short and cried:

"Billie, the man who murdered John Forrester knew

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that the bonds and the money were kept in the house. He knew it because someone foolishly told him so. If I can lay my hands on the man to whom this was told I shall have found my benefactor's murderer, and by God, when I'm cleared of this ridiculous charge and freed from this pen, I won't let up until I do!"

When Billie left the grim gray prison he was whistling softly. As he went down the stone steps into busy Centre Street, he muttered to himself:

"Bob tells a straight story. I believe him and I'll stick to him. But I'm d——d if it don't look deuced queer!"

CHAPTER XIII

MEANTIME, the public interest in the case grew, and the suspicion that Robert Forrester was the murderer was hourly strengthened. It seemed useless to look any further. There existed the strongest motive for the crime, and the nephew's bad reputation, added to the fact that he had had a violent quarrel with the merchant, and was in financial straits, gave color to the commonly accepted theory that, desperate, he had gone to the Forrester residence, not perhaps with the intention to commit murder but to make a fresh demand for money and protest against the new will. While talking to Mr. Forrester he saw the will lying in the open safe, and the idea of securing possession of it and destroying it at once flashed upon him. While the merchant's back was turned, he attempted to carry out his plan, and Mr. Forrester caught him at it. Words, probably a struggle, followed, until the nephew, frenzied, not knowing what he was doing, pulled his revolver and fired the fatal shots. He immediately realized what he had done, but it was too late to recall it. His victim was dead. He resolved to derive what good out of it he could. He took the bonds and currency from the safe, destroyed the will and left the house, leaving the door ajar. Instead of seeking safety in flight as a less cunning criminal might have done, he attempted to throw suspicion off the

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scent by turning up at his usual haunts, as if nothing uncommon had happened.

When, and in what condition, did he turn up at the gambling house? He arrived there after midnight, his shirt was bloody, his manner agitated. He displayed large sums of money which he did not have earlier in the day, and to account for his long absence he invented a story about a fight with thugs that no one deemed worthy of evidence. Added to all this, there was the missing will. No ordinary burglar would run the risk of detection by carrying off a paper of no possible use to him, but which on the contrary would incriminate him. Forrester, however, knew of this new will which threatened his very existence. He would risk anything—even the electric chair—to secure and destroy it.

This at least was the theory of Mr. Bryce, given in a hundred newspaper interviews, and no one doubted that it was the correct one. Mr. Townsend, Vivie Bryce and Harry Graham considered it exceedingly plausible. Even Virginia was convinced, and now began to hope with the others that the coroner would hold the nephew for trial so he might get his just deserts. She hated the very sound of his name, and despised herself for having seemed to excuse his conduct. Even if he were innocent of this shocking crime, he was still a monster of ingratitude, undeserving of the slightest sympathy. The whole affair sickened her, and she preferred to dismiss the subject from her mind and devote her thoughts to her preparations for her coming trip to Europe.

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Yet it was impossible to escape the sensational newspapers which fairly seethed with morbid details. Nothing else but the Forrester case was talked of and written about. The funeral of the victim attracted thousands of curious spectators, and so strong was the belief in the nephew's guilt that about the same time that the melancholy procession started from the Forrester residence on Second avenue, a group of persons gathered in front of the Tombs prison and made a hostile demonstration against the prisoner.

Mr. Bryce, in the absence of relatives, was the chief mourner, and the hearse was followed by hundreds of friends and employés. The crowd was so great that traffic was blocked and on many buildings the flags were at half mast in respect to the dead merchant.

As executor of the Forrester estate, under the new will, Mr. Bryce was considerably embarrassed by the disappearance of that document. Not only was he himself generously remembered in it, but unless it could be found, no legal obstacle would prevent the nephew taking possession of the dead man's house and property under the old will. If it could be shown that he killed the merchant, and the lawyer thought the evidence strong enough to convince any jury, the property would soon want another heir, will or no will, but if he escaped conviction, Robert Forrester was the legal heir.

The mere possibility of such an outcome was a bitter draught for the lawyer to swallow, even in anticipation, and he frantically ransacked the dead man's papers,

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still hoping to find the missing document. Did the nephew destroy it or had he concealed it? A hundred times a day he asked himself the question until Vivie said laughingly :

“ Really, uncle, one would think you regretted the will more than you do poor old Mr. Forrester.”

After that remark, Mr. Bryce had less to say about the missing document, but it was plain to see that it worried him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE day of the inquest arrived and the coroner's room on the top floor of the Criminal Courts building was jammed to the doors. Long before the proceedings began, not a seat was to be had. Even standing room was at a premium. The spectators were as densely packed as sardines. Everyone was there, the all New York of pleasure and fashion, eager to see and be seen at this première of a cause célèbre. A man's life was at stake. It was too good a show to miss. The morbidly inclined and the merely curious pressed eagerly forward to get a thrill of this sensation of the hour. Daintily gowned society dames rubbed elbows with bedraggled harlots, college professors jostled flashy Tenderloin gamblers. Mr. Bryce was conspicuous, sitting next to the district attorney, who was watching the inquest for the people. Harry Graham was standing at the back, and in the crowd were Billie Willets, Joe Mansfield and other friends of the man under arrest. Graham had asked Vivie and Virginia to come, but they had declined, saying it would be too painful.

The coroner, sitting as magistrate, took his seat at ten o'clock, and in his address to the jury reviewed briefly the facts of the case, the finding of the body, and the suspicious circumstances on which the police had made an arrest. It was for the jury to determine

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whether or not this arrest were justified. If the facts seemed to point to the nephew's guilt it was their duty to have the prisoner remanded for the Grand Jury. If, on the contrary, they found that the arrest had been without good cause it was their duty to so find. He then told the clerk to call the witnesses.

The first summoned were Policeman Lynch and Luke Deans, the man servant. After they had retold in detail how they discovered the body, Mr. Bryce was called.

The lawyer explained how, dissatisfied with his nephew's conduct, Mr. Forrester had directed him to draw up a new will; how it had been duly executed, and how, after the murder, it mysteriously disappeared. He had made a diligent search for the document among the dead man's papers, and he could arrive at only one conclusion, that it had been destroyed or concealed by the assassin. Only one man, added the witness significantly, was interested in the disappearance of that will, and that man was now under arrest on suspicion of having committed the murder. The fact that securities and \$25,000 in currency had been stolen from the safe was not, in his opinion, a point in favor of the dead merchant's nephew. While it is true that a man is hardly likely to rob himself, and in the absence of a new will, Robert Forrester would be entitled to succeed to the estate, was it not also true that the very first step on the part of a cunning criminal would be to divert suspicion from himself? By taking the securities it was no doubt intended to

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convey the impression that robbery was the only motive. It was also a fact to be noted that the nephew had at midnight a large sum of money in his possession, while earlier in the day he had been unable to pay a protested note for \$1,000.

"One minute, Mr. Bryce," interrupted the coroner. "You speak of securities which were in the safe. How do you know the securities were there?"

With a smile, as if amused at the childishness of the question, Mr. Bryce replied:

"It was common knowledge. Everyone knew that Mr. Forrester was in the habit of keeping securities to the amount of \$150,000 or more in his safe. I had often advised him to rent a box with some Safe Deposit company. Others had also warned him. But he was obstinate."

"Did anyone else know that these bonds were in the safe?" demanded the coroner.

"Everyone knew it—his servants, his friends, everybody."

"Did Robert Forrester, his nephew, know it?"

"Yes, sir. Robert Forrester certainly knew it. When a boy, and in his uncle's favor, the old man used to let him cut the coupons off when interest day came round."

This statement caused a thrill all around the court room. A buzz of voices arose, but was instantly silenced by the coroner.

"Do you remember what these securities were?"

"Yes, sir, I have here a list of them, which, for

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precaution sake, Mr. Forrester had given into the custody of his former lawyer, Mr. Theodore Kellog, who furnished the police with it. The securities are: New York Central \$1,000 bonds, Series A 824, A 825, A 826, A 827, A 828, A 829, A 830, A 831, A 832. Northern Pacific Railroad \$1,000 bonds, Series C 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383——”

“That will do Mr. Bryce. You are excused.”

The lawyer's statement, and the impressive, even theatrical manner in which he gave it, created a veritable sensation, and everyone turned to see what effect it would have on the prisoner. But Robert Forrester remained calm and imperturbable. Not a muscle of his face moved. His expression was inscrutable. He appeared not to have heard. Nothing seemed able to disturb his equanimity.

Police Captain Ziegler, when called, said that on the arrival of the prisoner at the station house he was searched, blood stains were noticed on his clothes and in his pocket was found a revolver, two chambers of which had been discharged. The bullets extracted from the murdered man's wounds fitted the prisoner's revolver exactly.

The clerk then called Robert Forrester.

A hush fell over the court room and all necks craned forward as Robert Forrester rose and faced the coroner. He was very pale, his white face and rather classic features sharply contrasted with his intensely black hair, reminding everyone of an old time portrait, and as he stood there surveying the

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crowd, his tall, slender figure dominated everyone in the court room. He was dressed in black with scrupulous care, and his manner was self-composed, cool, dignified, courteous. The spectators nudged each other. Could this handsome, distinguished looking man be the notorious gambler, the worthless scamp of a nephew, the man who was suspected of an awful crime? Society beauties forgot their languid pose and bent eagerly forward to regard him with closer attention, and their painted sisters of the pavements stared with amazement, neither comprehending that impending peril had placed this man on his metal. Robert Forrester was fighting now for his life. If he was to be saved every nerve must be strained, every good quality that lay dormant must be awakened, every honest impulse aroused, and this could not but have its chastening and regenerating effect on his general appearance and manner. He waited politely for the coroner, whispering every now and then to his lawyer, who was seated near him.

"Your name?" demanded the coroner.

"Robert Forrester."

"Your profession or occupation?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then slowly the answer came.

"No occupation."

The coroner, an energetic, pompous and little man with fatherly side whiskers and spectacles, coughed and cleared his throat as he approached the more important questions:

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"Now, Mr. Forrester, can you tell this jury how you spent the evening of December 26th?"

Every listener bent eagerly forward. The crucial moment had arrived. Each word the prisoned uttered now was of vital importance. The slightest hesitation in his examination, the least lack of frankness might decide his fate. But Forrester gave no evidence of embarrassment. His demeanor was cool as ever. He talked freely of his movements on the night of the murder, telling practically the same story as that he told Mansfield and Billie at the gambling house. He explained how he went to see Marks, the money lender, at eight o'clock expecting to go to Mansfield's about nine. He left the money lender's about eight thirty, and stopped in a saloon on the way uptown for a drink and started throwing dice with two men, who later followed him out and attacked him in Washington Square. He fired his revolver twice in self defense and became unconscious. When he came to, long after midnight, he noticed that his nose was bleeding. He called a passing cab and drove straight to Mansfield's. He reached the gambling house shortly before one o'clock and remained there playing roulette until the moment of his arrest. That was all he had to say.

There was a murmur all over the court room. Everyone looked at his neighbor and shook his head incredulously. The attempt at an alibi was too clumsy. Mr. Bryce smiled derisively and whispered something to the district attorney. Mr. Farrell, the prisoner's attorney, sprang to his feet.

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"Mr. Coroner, my client has accounted for all his time on the night of the murder. He has shown that he was not anywhere near the Forrester residence at the hour the crime was committed." Raising his voice and looking in the direction of Mr. Bryce, he continued: "The suspicions on which the police made the arrest are baseless and absurd, and but for the personal animosity of one man, who has always followed my client with his hatred, this ridiculous charge would not have been made."

Mr. Farrell stopped to glare at Mr. Bryce, who immediately sprang to his feet and shouted:

"Mr. Coroner, I protest against personalities being dragged into this case. The learned counsel's remarks are intended for me. I protest——"

The coroner rapped for order.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, I must insist——"

"Your Honor," continued Mr. Farrell, "you have heard my client's very frank and full explanation of his movements on that fatal night. I move that Robert Forrester be honorably discharged from custody."

"One moment, Mr. Farrell," replied the coroner. "The prisoner has told his story with apparent frankness, but so far his statements are entirely uncorroborated."

"I should say they were!" exclaimed Mr. Bryce very audibly.

"We can prove it, your honor," cried Mr. Farrell.

"Very well," replied the coroner curtly. "Call your witnesses."

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The lawyer called :

" Joseph Marks."

Mr. Marks rose timidly from his seat behind the railing and came forward with shambling gait to take his seat in the witness chair.

" Your name? " asked the coroner.

" Joseph Marks."

" You lend money at usury? "

" At interest," corrected the old man.

" You know the prisoner? "

" Yes—he is a client."

" Where were you Wednesday evening, December 26th? "

" In my office in Delancey street."

" Did you see the prisoner that night? "

" Yes, he called to see me."

" What time did he call? "

" It was just eight o'clock."

" How do you remember the hour so accurately? "

" Because I had just set a watch which a customer had left to be regulated. If you need any thing in that line, Judge—"

" Silence! " thundered the coroner.

" What was the prisoner's object in calling on you? "

" He asked me to renew a note and advance him \$500."

" Did you grant either of these requests? "

" I agreed to renew the note on further good security he gave me, but I refused to advance more money."

" Why? "

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"Because I feared I'd never get it back."

Laughter in the court room was instantly repressed by the coroner.

"How long was the prisoner in your place?"

"About half an hour."

"You are excused."

Mr. Marks climbed down, looking vastly relieved that the ordeal was over. Taking his hat the old man scurried out of the court room as if afraid the coroner might change his mind and recall him.

"Call Patrick Rafferty," said Mr. Farrell.

A square-jawed Irishman, with a pushed-in face like a bull dog, slouched up to the witness stand.

"Your name?"

"Patrick Rafferty."

"Business or occupation?"

"Bartender."

"Where were you on Wednesday evening, December 26th?"

"Tending bar at Mike Logan's joint on West Ninth street."

"Look carefully at the prisoner. Did you ever see him before?"

The man turned a pair of bleary, blood-shot eyes on Forrester and nodded.

"Yes."

"Where did you see him?"

"In our joint."

"Was he alone?"

"No, he came in with two other guys—one a sport

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named Barnes, the other a bloke known as Silent Jim."

"What time did they come in?"

"Can't recollect to the minute. I reckon about nine o'clock."

"What were the prisoner and the other men doing in your place?"

"Drinking whiskey and throwing dice."

"At what time did they leave?"

"Eleven o'clock. I'm sure of that because I happened to look at the clock."

"Why did you look at the clock?"

"Because I wanted to see how soon it was to shutting up time?"

"That's all. You are excused."

Mr. Farrell turned to the coroner:

"Your Honor, we have scoured all New York to find the man Barnes and his partner, 'Silent Jim,' but we have been unable to locate them. They are probably in hiding, fearing the consequences of an assault on my client."

"Do I understand then that you have called all your witnesses in rebuttal to the charges of the police?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir, we have still one more. I call James Masterson?"

A red-faced man, with a decidedly horsey air got up and took his seat.

"Your name?" demanded the coroner.

"James Masterson."

"Business—occupation?"

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"Hack driver."

"Did you ever see the prisoner before?"

"Yes—on the night of December 26th."

"Where did you see him?"

"I saw him first on Washington Square."

"At what time?"

"It was well past midnight, nearer one o'clock I guess."

"What was he doing?"

"He hailed me. The night was foggy, and at first I didn't see him. He was in evening dress and seemed a bit unsteady on his legs. I thought he'd been drinking."

"He got into your cab?"

"Yes, sir, and I drove him to Mr. Mansfield's on West Thirty-seventh Street."

"That will do. You are excused."

Mr. Farrell faced the coroner triumphantly. A smile crossed the pale face of the prisoner. Murmurs of surprise ran all through the room.

"I think, Mr. Coroner, that we have proven an alibi to the satisfaction of this jury!"

Mr. Bryce coughed derisively and was heard to remark to the district attorney:

"Very ingenious. But who are these witnesses? Wholly discreditable people. A ten dollar bill would purchase any of them."

Everyone in the court room was talking at once, and there were some hisses as Mr. Farrell ended his remarks. It was plain to see that the evidence had failed to impress the audience favorably. The coroner

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was in earnest consultation with the district attorney who, from time to time, was seen to shake his shoulders suggestively.

The coroner rapped for order and addressed the jury. They had, he said, heard the facts as presented by the police. They had also heard the man who was under arrest, charged formally by the police with the crime. The jury must admit that the suspicion against the prisoner was sufficient to justify his arrest. His violent quarrel with the dead man a few days before the murder, the fact that the new will was missing, and that he, the nephew, was the only man interested in removing or destroying that will, the nephew's bad reputation, his desperate financial condition, the blood stains on his clothing, his agitated manner at the gambling house—all this was strong presumptive evidence of his guilt. On the other hand, none of the stolen bonds had been found in his possession or traced to him, he had accounted for the blood stains and for the emptied barrels of his revolver, and also for his long absence on the night of the murder, and what was more important he had produced witnesses who had corroborated these statements. So far, the police had failed to produce a single tangible piece of evidence connecting Robert Forrester, now in custody, with the murder of the dead merchant. It was for the jury to decide if there were enough presumptive evidence to warrant his being held for the Grand Jury.

The jurymen filed out of the room and in less than five minutes they returned.

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"Well, gentlemen?" demanded the coroner, while all the spectators held their breath.

"We find that John Forrester was murdered by some person or persons unknown to this jury!"

The next instant, Mr. Farrell, Billie Willets and Joe Mansfield were wringing Forrester's hand, while the others in the court room broke up into excited, gesticulating groups! There were hisses and only a few handclaps. That the verdict was an unpopular one was evident. Mr. Bryce was seen in the midst of a group talking loudly—brandishing his arms. Harry Graham, as he rushed past Billie, said sarcastically:

"Say, Billie, what did it cost your blackguard friend to fix that jury?"

Robert Forrester left the court room a free man, yet, notwithstanding the verdict which exonerated him, it was the general opinion that he was guilty, and the inability of the police to find any other clue only strengthened this impression. The newspapers declared it was a scandal on the city to let such a crime go unpunished, and openly hinted that the guilty man was well known and not only at large but preparing to benefit by his unnatural crime.

Forrester soon found the situation an intolerable one. Indifferent as he was to the opinion of others, accustomed as he was to being socially ostracised, it was different when it came to being suspected of a horrible crime. The law had vindicated or at least acquitted him, and even Mr. Bryce, much as he might fume and rage, was powerless to prevent him taking possession

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of the dead man's estate as lawful heir under the original will. But Robert Forrester became a marked man in town. When he went out people pointed him out as the man who killed his benefactor. Gradually his own associates avoided him. Tradespeople were not over anxious for his patronage, and servants left him suddenly without explanation. He sought admission to clubs and was promptly blackballed. Everybody shrank from him as they would from a leper. Many hinted that he had hidden the bonds and would keep them concealed until the affair had blown over, having only taken them to make people think robbery was the prime motive of the crime. No man, however stoical, could stand this long and nobody was surprised when about three months after the death of the merchant it was announced that Robert Forrester had sold his house and was going abroad, probably never to return. The news was received with indifference and only served to strengthen the popular idea that the nephew was guilty and wanted to be out of reach in case the affair was ever re-opened.

Part II

CHAPTER I

“OH, I hope Monsieur Reney will come,” said Vivie anxiously, and going to the front window, as she had done a dozen times before during the last half hour. “It means everything to me if I get him to let me make my *début* this month. He said he’d be here at four, yet it’s five o’clock already. If he disappoints me I’ll slap his nasty old face the next time I see him.”

Virginia, who was sitting at a desk writing a letter to New York, looked up and laughed:

“What an impetuous creature you are, Vivie! Of course he’ll come, if he said he would. Did one ever hear of a Frenchman failing to keep an appointment with a woman?”

“I’m not a woman, I’m an artiste,” retorted Vivie, and flopping herself down at the piano she gave utterance to a few high C’s to prove her claim.

“Perhaps he called while we were out. Go and ask the concierge,” suggested Virginia.

“I never thought of that. That wretched Madame Garache must have let him go. If she has I’ll scratch her eyes out!”

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Flinging open the door of their ground floor flat which led directly onto the main entrance, Vivie flew across the hall to the sanctum of that all powerful and much dreaded personage—the Parisian janitress. Like most of her class, Mme. Garache was a tall, big-boned woman with a well developed mustache, bristling eyebrows, toothless gums and claw-like hands, a modern ogress with broom and feather duster, a lineal descendant of the Furies who marched ten thousand strong to Versailles during the bloody days of the Revolution and screeched “Death to the Austrian woman!” She smirked hypocritically or glared ferociously, according to how one stood in her good graces. Vivie hated the sight of her, in fact, was afraid of her, but by this time she had learned the expediency of cultivating the favor of the janitress, so smiling most affably, she asked in her blindest manner:

“Are you sure, madame, that the monsieur didn’t call while we were out? A short fat man with a silk hat and frock coat—*en artiste*—so?”

With admirable mimicry, she assumed the pompous attitudes of the strutting, self satisfied theatre impresario.

“*Mais non, mademoiselle,*” snapped the ogress, with an air of offended dignity. “Mademoiselle told me the monsieur was coming. He didn’t come. If he isn’t here it isn’t my fault, *n’est ce pas?*” With a leer she added: “Maybe he’s calling on some other *demoiselle.*”

An angry reply was on the tip of Vivie’s tongue,

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but controlling herself, she smiled more sweetly than ever and said:

"*Merci bien*, madame! You are so obliging. Please say we're at home if he calls. I won't forget you."

As this reckless promise meant a present of money now or at some future time, the concierge grew more amiable.

"*Merci mademoiselle!* Oh, don't be afraid. The monsieur will come all right. Mademoiselle is so *gentille!* I'll look out for him, *n'ayez pas peur!*"

Vivie returned to Virginia and flinging herself down peevishly before the piano again began practising the mad scene from "Lucia."

Two years of European training had done wonders for Vivie. Not only had she acquired French with remarkable celerity, speaking the polished language of diplomacy with astonishing fluency and practically without accent, but her experiences in foreign art circles and her constant association with singers and critics had broadened her character as well as her art, and in a few months transformed the little provincial amateur into the cosmopolitan artiste. Her voice, also, had developed wonderfully. Under the guidance of famous teachers it had quickly gained in volume and tone until soon there were few of the great soprano roles which she was not able to sing at a moment's notice. All she now needed was the opportunity to make her debut on an important stage, so that the critics and the public might hear her voice. Of her success and ultimate triumph she did not for a moment

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doubt. She saw as in a vision the vast opera house crowded to the doors with an immense audience eager to hear the new prima donna. She already felt the frightful nervous dread of her first entrance. She saw the vast yawning black space where sat her judges, the hundreds of levelled opera glasses, she heard the first few notes listened to in silence, and then the grand aria attacked with confidence, wonderfully sung, her voice filling every corner of the auditorium, and the storm of applause which proclaimed her triumph. The rest would be easy. The opera directors, following each other like sheep, would tumble over each other to secure her services. She would receive an offer by cable to return home and sing at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. When she landed, the director would meet her, hat in hand, reporters would interview her and she would throw herself into her uncle's arms sobbing hysterically:

"It's come at last, uncle, it's come at last!"

That was her day dream. She lived on it and in moments of complete discouragement her spirits were buoyed up by it. It flared up, a spiritual beacon in her young life, ever urging her on to renewed effort. But the way to success had been hard. She was far from strong and the work necessary to make such progress as she had made would have killed any other girl with less pluck and nervous energy. She had to study or rehearse many hours, day and night, going from teacher to theatre in all kinds of weather, sometimes wet through to the skin and completely chilled, often

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hungry because she had no time to eat. For hours she would stand on the draughty stages of small provincial theatres while indifferent directors sat critically in front, trying out her voice. Yet she never faltered. She knew it was necessary to begin at the bottom if she wished to attain the goal she ambitioned, the Imperial Opera House, the Mecca of all vocal aspirations, the graduating place of the world's great mistresses of song. So always cheerful and high spirited she battled on uncomplainingly. A cold settled on her lungs and she coughed incessantly. Then she would have to stop work entirely while Virginia nursed her back to health with all the care of a devoted elder sister. The danger once past, she would disregard all counsel, returning valiantly to the fray, determined to succeed. But the period of waiting was long and full of disappointments and heart burnings. She met other American girls, all with good voices, who had tried and hoped and waited for years and were still waiting, until Vivie was appalled at the apparent hopelessness of the struggle.

She heard only spasmodically from her uncle, and it was some months after her arrival in Paris before she received the first letter. Mr. Bryce spoke vaguely of mysterious business plans that might compel him to close up their home in New York and take a trip to California. There was no local news that would interest her. The police had failed to find any new clue in the Forrester case, and he himself was as firmly convinced as ever that they had let the murderer

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slip through their fingers. There was no news of Robert Forrester, who was supposed to be still in Europe. He hoped that everything was well with her and going according to her wishes, and he enclosed a cheque for her immediate expenses. Vivie would have preferred to find in the letter a few words saying that he had missed her and expressing the hope that she soon might return, but none knew better than she that her uncle was a peculiar man, not given to writing affectionate letters.

Then one day a journalist friend spoke of her to Monsieur Reney, director of the Imperial Opera House, who had consented to hear her sing. The audition was a great success, for had not Monsieur Reney warmly congratulated her and asked how soon she could be ready? How soon? To-night if necessary, she had replied, almost ready to faint from joy. Then Monsieur Reney had made the appointment to call the next day at the modest little apartment in the rue Galvani, where she lived with Virginia.

The two girls had been together practically all the time ever since they left New York. Virginia had been successful in a field better suited to her more evenly poised temperament, and as satisfying artistically, if not as feverishly exciting, as the operatic career. After a course at Julien's she had studied with Gérôme, Bouguereau, Richepin, and other famous masters of the contemporary French school, and all complimented her on her work and urged her to continue. Thus encouraged, she had started on a large

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picture, a composition of her own, an ambitious canvas which she hoped to exhibit at next spring's Salon. She loved her work and was entirely absorbed in it. Her former interests in New York seemed insignificant by comparison. At regular intervals she heard from her sister, who told her that Pip, Toto and Curley, now two years older, had not forgotten dear Aunt Virginia and kept inquiring when she would return. The children were what she missed most. Life in Europe she found more complete, less trivial than in America. The people one met were more interesting, they talked of things worth discussing. There was less sordidness, less vulgarity, less commonplaceness. Culture and brains counted for more than mere money. The creation and criticism of art and letters, the intellectual activities of the world, the victories of science, the constant intercourse with men and women of distinction, artists, composers, authors, musicians, sculptors—people who did things—all this she found more satisfying mentally than the fluctuations of the stock market, which had been her brother-in-law's sole topic at home, or the silly inconsequential chatter about dress, theatres, bridge whist and other social follies and orgies that form nine-tenths of the conversation in New York drawing-rooms.

From the Townsends, Virginia learned that Mr. Bryce had met with considerable losses in the recent panic in Wall Street and, judging from his worried and ill appearance, his affairs were in a most precarious condition, perhaps involving the loss of his house and

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all his furniture. Virginia was careful to keep the news from Vivie, fearing it might alarm her.

When Vivie had to sing out of town, at Toulouse or some other provincial place, Virginia always accompanied her. She rather enjoyed the trips, for she would take her sketch book with her and find many interesting subjects—old castles, picturesque valleys, quaint peasants, etc.—to add to her portfolio. When in Paris they lived happily together in the little apartment they had taken in the rue Galvani, near the Avenue de Villiers, the fashionable quarter for artists, enjoying thoroughly an unconventional Bohemian sort of existence. They had a little circle of acquaintances—French artists and fellow students of the American colony, and among them Harry Graham was the most faithful. The big fellow was still in Paris studying architecture, and he had often proved of great assistance to both girls, escorting them where they could not go alone and watching generally after their interests. Sometimes he would take them by surprise, bringing tickets for the theatre and insisting on taking them to dinner. Vivie on these occasions tried to get out of it, insisting that she made one too many, but Graham would not hear of it. He had long since given up all idea of being more to Virginia than a friend, and the pact of friendship they had entered into he had kept religiously. At other times they would arrange little evenings at home, inviting a few artists, journalists and singers, when they had music, followed by a cold supper of those delicious dainties, the preparation of which the French *charcutier* makes an art.

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"You sing that beautifully, dear!" exclaimed Virginia with enthusiasm, as Vivie terminated a brilliant roulade of trills.

"I wish the managers thought so," replied Vivie, shutting down the piano with a slam. Rising and going once more to the window, she exclaimed with impatience: "I do hope that idiotic Monsieur Reney will come soon. Mrs. Parkes is coming to tea at five. Mr. Graham said he might drop in, too. It would never do for them to be here while I'm talking business with——"

Suddenly she stopped short and gave a little scream:

"Gracious, there is Monsieur Reney, trying to find the house! He's coming in."

The sight of the much desired opera director had the effect upon her drooping spirits of the most powerful stimulant. She leaped in the air with ecstasy, knocked over a chair and nearly spilled a bottle of ink over Virginia's light dress.

The next instant their bell rang, and a fat little man with a black pointed beard, obviously dyed, a flowing tie, peg-top trousers and a silk hat with a flat brim, appeared on the threshold. Bowing with exaggerated politeness he inquired:

"*Mlle. Bryce est-elle chez elle?*" Then recognizing Vivie, he exclaimed explosively: "Ah, *c'est vous*, mademoiselle! How do you do—how do you do!"

"Come in, monsieur. I began to fear you would not come." Introducing Virginia, she added: "A friend of mine—Miss Norman."

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The impresario bowed and showed his teeth.

"Mademoiselle is a singer also?" he asked.

"No," laughed Virginia. "I paint—or try to."

"Miss Norman wouldn't put up with a business which makes one wait hours for opera directors," said Vivie sarcastically.

Instantly Monsieur Reney apologized.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, mademoiselle. I was kept at the theatre. It could not be helped. Ah, now to business!"

He put his flat brimmed hat on the piano, blew his nose loudly and took a seat on the piano stool.

"Yes—to business!" said Vivie eagerly, hardly able to contain her impatience. At last, she was about to be engaged for a metropolitan stage.

"I have decided to put 'Lucia' on the bill next Wednesday night," he began with an air of importance.

"Yes—yes!" said Vivie breathlessly. "I know every note of it. I can sing it at a moment's notice. When do the rehearsals begin?"

The director raised his hand.

"Wait, my dear mademoiselle. Not so fast. You artistes are so impulsive. First we must discuss business."

"Business," echoed Vivie. "Oh, yes, I understand—my salary—a contract. I understand. But that's only a detail. It's the début I want. The rest is a minor consideration. I don't care about the money you want to offer me. Don't you see, Monsieur Reney, this means a lot to me——"

The director twisted his black moustache.

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"Of course—of course—*je comprends*, that's why I'm here. This début means everything to you. That is why we must discuss business before going any further."

"I don't understand!" faltered Vivie, "what else is there to discuss? You like my voice—you predict success. You are sure I know the part. What else is there to discuss?"

Monsieur Reney smiled as if in pity at the ingenuousness of her question.

"*Sapristi!* You artistes are all alike! You think only of the glory—the excitement, the applause! But what about the expense? You don't think of that. Opera costs money—barrels of it. Directors have to pay their bills."

Vivie opened wide her eyes. What could he be driving at? Misgivings seized her.

"I don't understand," she faltered. "Please be more explicit."

The director coughed and fidgeted nervously on his chair.

"*Ma foi*, mademoiselle, it is very simple. We are going to give 'Lucia,' *n'est ce pas?* A dozen singers who can sing the part just as well as you are also eager to appear in the rôle. They are ready to give anything for the opportunity. Now, it is very obvious that all of them can't get the part. Therefore, as a business man, the director must choose the débutante who is most desirable, not only from the artistic, but from the business point of view. To be entirely frank, if you

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are engaged, there must be some pecuniary consideration."

At last Vivie understood. The proposition could not be put plainer. Instead of the manager arranging to pay her for her services, it was a question of how much she would pay the manager for the privilege of appearing at his opera house. Her heart sank while at the same time her wrath rose. Controlling herself with difficulty, she said:

"So I am expected to pay for my *début*? May I ask how much is expected of me? I have heard of such requests being made to singers, but I hardly thought this could be true of such a world famous opera house as the Imperial."

The director looked relieved that she seemed to take it so sensibly.

Mais si, mais si, mademoiselle. It is the custom all over the world, in your America as well as in England and on the Continent. Human nature is the same all over the world. There are a lot of singers and only a very few opera houses. Singers with money will give anything just to get before the public. They do not mind paying a small sum, and it has considerable influence, I assure you."

"What do you consider a small sum?" asked Vivie, with a view of learning everything possible about the operatic career.

"*Ma foi!* I know you are not rich. I'll make it easy. Suppose we say five thousand francs. Add another thousand and I'll make it all right with the

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critics. They're an exacting lot, difficult to please, glad to crush a beginner, but a few *douceurs* judiciously distributed, accomplishes miracles. Come, what do you say? It's little enough. Last season one of your compatriots gave me twice as much, and it paid her, for now she's singing at Covent Garden."

Vivie rose from her seat. Her face was white and her manner frigid.

"Our business is ended, monsieur," she said, with a restraint that surprised Virginia, and somewhat intimidated the director. "Every word you say insults my dignity as an artiste. If operatic conditions in Europe are as you say I regret the hour when first I was seized with the ambition to become a prima donna. You can give the rôle to someone else, to whom you please, to whoever is willing to pay your blood money, to the highest bidder! After all the years I have studied, after all the work I have done to cultivate my voice, and study a beautiful art, I should feel degraded as an artiste and as a woman if I entered into any pact with you to pay my way into the favor of the public or the critics. Rather than that I shall never sing another note. Good day, monsieur!"

She opened the door, towering over the little impresario like some scornful tragic queen, practically putting him out ignominiously. He attempted to stammer out excuses:

"*Mais, mademoiselle—*"

"Good day, monsieur," she repeated, still holding the door open.

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No course was left him but retreat, so bowing to Virginia he backed out and Vivie slammed the door in his face. Then, coming back into the room, she threw herself on the sofa, and woman-like, relieved her pent up feelings by a flood of tears.

"Didn't I tell you how hard it was!" she sobbed hysterically. "After all my work, all my waiting! It isn't the money, it's the degradation, the sordidness of it all! But I told him what I thought of him, didn't I?"

Virginia did her best to console her. It was a great disappointment, of course, but it was childish to be discouraged. There would be other opportunities, if not in Paris, in some other city. She could go to Brussels or Milan. Perhaps the same conditions did not exist there.

But Vivie was thoroughly incensed. She would go back to New York. She did not care for success if it could be bought. It was a vicious, rotten system encouraged by critics and managers for their own corrupt ends. This explained why the stage was crowded with mediocre performers, people whose apparent success no one could explain, while genuine ability, unable to purchase favors, was kept in the background. No, she was sick of the whole thing!

Vivie was in the midst of this vehement tirade when once more the door bell rang. This time it was Harry Graham.

"Am I in time for the tea party?" he asked gaily. Noticing traces of tears he looked surprised.

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"Nothing wrong, I hope, is there?" he asked.

Virginia hastened to explain, while Vivie fled to another room. When she had finished Graham was almost exploding with indignation.

"It's good for him I wasn't here," he said fiercely. "I'd have thrown the cur out. What a nerve to come and make her such a proposition as that!"

Presently Vivie reappeared, smiling. She was too full of animal spirits to remain long depressed, and she set about getting some tea, while Virginia and Graham talked of art matters.

"Say, girls," exclaimed Graham suddenly, "who do you suppose I saw on the Boulevard to-day? Signor Bentoni. He asked after you. I told him you were out of town."

"I'm glad you did," replied Virginia quickly. "I've taken a violent dislike to him."

Graham chortled with satisfaction. His hated rival had got his deserts at last.

Signor Bentoni had reached Paris a few months after the arrival of the two girls, and at first they had welcomed the artist to the Rue Galvani. He knew everybody of importance in Paris art circles, and Virginia realized that he could be of enormous service later when her picture was ready for the Salon. The Signor mistook this cordiality as a tribute to his own powers of fascination. Thinking the moment propitious, he boldly declared himself, and asked Virginia to marry him. At first she felt flattered, then she was amused. She quickly guessed his real motive, and even if she

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could ever care for the man, the thought that her money was the attraction would be enough to kill any feelings he might have aroused. She told him as kindly as possible that all hopes in that direction were out of the question, but, far from being discouraged, the artist attempted to compromise her so that he might virtually force her consent, and one day at their apartment his behavior was such that Virginia was compelled to tell him in very plain fashion that she was too busy with her work to receive him. Since then she had seen nothing of him.

"May I come in?" asked a voice.

The three were so busy talking that they did not notice that a cab had stopped at the door. A handsome, richly dressed woman, of middle age, got out and came to their door, which had been left ajar.

"It's Mrs. Parkes!" cried Virginia.

The new arrival kissed the girls effusively and extended a hand to Graham.

"It's so cozy here after those horrid formal receptions," she smiled. "I've been all afternoon making a round of calls and frankly I've been bored to death. Paris makes me tired anyhow. I'm going back to Switzerland next week." Taking a cup of tea from Vivie she rattled on: "Well, dear, is the date of your *début* fixed? I hear they're going to do 'Lucia'? And your picture, Virginia, when are you going to have that finished? I wrote Mr. Parkes to-day that I considered you the two bravest girls I ever knew, to stay here in this horrid city working yourselves to death

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when you could be enjoying the glorious air of the mountains. You know I asked you to come to Switzerland. You must come, I won't take a refusal. Why, Vivie, what's the matter? You don't look well."

Once more explanations had to be entered into.

"Yes, it's an outrage," said Mrs. Parkes. "That's what they do over here, and if you're an American they try to make you pay twice as much. Everyone knows it's done. The critics know it and the public knows it. What can you do about it? If the directors don't ask for money they ask for something else. They say all kinds of dreadful things about S——, that she would never be where she is to-day if she hadn't bestowed her favors on the composers and the directors. Monsieur Reney didn't go that far, did he?"

"He didn't dare!" laughed Vivie. "I'd have taken the broom to him."

"Talking of horrid men," went on Mrs. Parkes, as she helped herself to a piece of cake, "I didn't tell you girls of the adventure I had at Chamounix just before coming up to Paris this time."

"No," said Virginia, interested, "What was it?"

"I nearly got myself horsewhipped by a brute of a man, that's all!" replied Mrs. Parkes.

"Horsewhipped? What do you mean?" cried all three listeners in chorus.

"One afternoon I was taking a walk when my attention was attracted to an English dog cart, drawn by a spirited young horse. The animal had displeased its owner in some way, and he was flogging

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it terribly. The poor beast was all flecked with foam and writhed with pain, prancing and rearing in the traces as if seeking to escape the cruel punishment inflicted by a strong and merciless hand. I didn't know the man to speak to. His name is Stanton. He's an Englishman or American—no one in Chamounix knows exactly which. He's said to have money, but he associates with no one, and owing to his bearish behavior no one in the American colony wants to improve the acquaintance. But I couldn't stand on the formality of our introduction when a poor dumb creature was suffering. I went right up to him and gave him a piece of my mind. He gave me such a look that for a moment I thought he was going to hit me with the whip. I never saw a man in such a rage. His face was white and he had bitten his lips till they were bleeding. Fiercely he said: 'Madame, you must permit me to do with what is mine as I see fit! And he began flogging the horse again. I was so worked up that tears were in my eyes. I couldn't stand it any longer, and I hurried away to find a policeman. When I returned with one, the dog cart and its savage owner had disappeared.'

"And that's the place you want to take me to," said Virginia laughing, "to run the risk of meeting such human brutes as that!"

"Now, girls, I'm talking seriously," said Mrs. Parkes. "You've both worked long enough. It is absolutely necessary that you take a rest. I want you both to come down to Chamounix for a few weeks. I insist upon it."

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"Virginia can go," said Vivie. "As for me, it's out of the question. It is impossible for me to leave my work. Even if I can't get engagements, I must go on with the fight just the same. The harder they make it for me, the more determined I am to get there. But Virginia can go. She must. I insist upon it. It will do her a world of good."

Mrs. Parkes turned to Virginia. Vivie was right. She had no good reason for declining the invitation. She had not yet visited Switzerland, and no artist could afford to miss seeing that marvelous country. It would be an inspiration in her work. Later they were all going for a few days to the Riviera when she could get a glimpse of Monte Carlo.

Virginia argued against it, but only feebly. After all, she thought, why should she not go? She needed a change of air and such an opportunity might not offer itself again. So she allowed herself to be persuaded, and it was agreed that she should make immediate arrangements to leave Paris with Mrs. Parkes the following Friday.

"And what's to become of me?" asked Harry Graham with comic consternation.

"Oh, I'll take care of you—you poor, abandoned boy!" laughed Vivie.

CHAPTER II

THE hot afternoon sun was beating down pitilessly from a cloudless sky. The trees, rocks and grass were burnt yellow by the protracted drought, and from the parched roads arose clouds of chalky dust at each breath of the wind. Away in the distance soared the majestic mountains, their lofty peaks white and glistening with eternal snows. Straight ahead ran the narrow mountain road, growing wilder in aspect at each step of the ascent, winding its serpentine, perilous course around the bare face of the precipitous cliffs, walls of solid rock rising abruptly to dizzy heights and crowned at their summits by terrifying glaciers which threatened momentarily to hurl their overhanging ice masses in swift-moving avalanches, to destroy life and property in their thunderous fall. On the left, and guarded only by a low stone parapet, was a precipice, a sheer drop of some two thousand feet, with hamlets nestling peacefully at the base of the wooded slopes.

In the valley below Nature appeared in her more gentle mood. There were shimmering lakes, set in frames of emerald, torrents splashing playfully through wooded ravines, cultivated fields, smiling vineyards and fruitful orchards, the smiling landscape dotted here and there with scattered villages and the lonely huts of the Alpine shepherds. In the silent air arose

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the sound of tinkling bells as cattle strayed from field to field, and one heard the occasional bark of a dog.

Nowhere in Switzerland is one more impressed with the grandeur of its scenery than in the beautiful Chamounix valley, the heart of the Mont Blanc region. The Bernese Oberland may be more picturesque and the glaciers of Zermatt more awe inspiring, but for sublime scenery and beauty of environs Chamounix has few rivals. This at least was the opinion of a stranger who, having reached on foot the point in the road where it emerges from the Planpraz woods, halted for a moment to enjoy the sight. On the left towered the Aiguilles Rouges, and as he proceeded and neared the Col du Brévent he was suddenly confronted with a stupendous view of Mont Blanc. It was four o'clock, and the sun was already sinking behind the mountain ranges, filling the deep valleys with shadow, tinting every object a hundred different shades, while the tops of the loftiest peaks were still bathed in brightest sunshine. Completely fascinated, the stranger stood still, spellbound by the glorious scene before him.

He was tall and dark, about thirty-five years of age, with hair just turning gray, and his dress and general appearance stamped him either English or American. Judging by the dusty appearance of his boots and clothes, he had walked some distance. That he was tired after his long climb up the mountain was plain, for he sat down wearily on the loose stump of a tree and whistled to his dog which had run on ahead.

"Come here, Spot. Come and sit down, sir. If

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you're half as tired as your master you deserve a good rest before we start back to Chamounix."

The dog came bounding back, expressing by joyful barks full approval of his master's remarks.

The man, meantime, was examining the queer zig-zag formation of the road, noting the curious way in which it clung to the mountain, hewn out of sheer rock, hanging between earth and sky. He admired the skill of the engineers who had overcome apparently unsurmountable difficulties and succeeded in making practicable roads down the face of almost perpendicular mountains.

"Wonderful!" he muttered to himself. "It's amazing how they can drive a carriage safely down such a steep grade and round such sharp turns! The slightest carelessness on the part of the driver, one mis-step of the horse, and over they'd go, to be dashed to death on the rocks 2,000 feet below!"

He knew that all the roads in Switzerland were the same. With just enough width to permit of the passing of two vehicles, it ran its zig-zag course up and down the mountain, a wall of inaccessible granite on one side, an abyss on the other. On it went, stopping for no obstacle, now bridging a yawning chasm, now boring a tunnel through solid rock, ever ascending. Sometimes the engineers had not found enough foothold on the face of the mountain, so they built piles of stonework, and so the road ran for miles over a yawning precipice. It made one's flesh creep, but nothing ever happened. So expert were the na-

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tive drivers that no one thought of danger. They drove carriages at full speed down the mountain, making turns that made the heart leap to one's throat, yet always escaping disaster.

Yet he wondered what would happen if the carriage horses suddenly took it into their heads to run away. Certainly nothing could stop them, no driver could make that sharp turn with a runaway team. Even if the horses, warned by their instinct, stopped of their own accord at the brink of the precipice, the momentum would be too great, the carriage and its occupants would be carried over to certain death in the valley below. He glanced over the low wall and shuddered. The terrible height gave him a sensation of dizziness, and he involuntarily recoiled as if afraid that he might be seized with an irresistible desire to throw himself over.

Sufficiently rested, he arose, and calling Spot was about to retrace his steps towards Chamounix when suddenly he heard a distinct noise that made him start and listen intently. It sounded like a horse or horses galloping. At first he thought he was mistaken. No horses could go at such a gait on that road. Yet the sound grew more distinct. It came nearer and nearer. Doubt was no longer possible. It was a carriage, and the horses were running away. Then he heard a woman scream.

His heart throbbed violently. He could hear its pulsation. Alternately he felt himself grow hot and cold. What he feared had happened! There was a

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runaway, and it was coming down that very road. In a few seconds it would be upon him and he would be witnessing a tragedy. He ran hastily forward to the next bend of the road, and saw in the distance in a cloud of dust a carriage tearing at full speed down the mountain. There was no driver on the box, and the horses' necks were outstretched with terror. The carriage was rocking fearfully, and in it he could see a girl, pale as death, trying to steady herself.

For a moment he stood glued to the spot. The spectacle of this awful ride to death held him spell-bound. He was as if paralyzed by the realization of his own helplessness. Nothing could stop those horses. He knew that. They were literally falling down the mountain. The momentum was fearful. Nothing on earth could save that unfortunate girl from being dashed to a horrible death at the foot of the precipice.

On tore the horses, the carriage swaying fearfully from side to side and at each step gaining speed. The girl had stopped screaming now and sat crouching low in the carriage; as if waiting for the end. The man marvelled at his own inaction; he wondered if he would be able to witness the crash, to hear the girl's death scream as she disappeared over the brink. As long as he lived her despairing shriek would ring in his ears. Only a few seconds had passed since he first heard the galloping hoofs, but to him it seemed like hours. When would the agony be over?

On tore the horses, the noise of their hoofs on the hard road echoing down the valley. Now he could



AT THAT INSTANT A PISTOL SHOT RANG OUT.

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see the girl's face. She was young and pretty, and from her dress he judged her to be an American tourist. Amidst clouds of dust they came on like a whirlwind, and for the first time the girl noticed the stranger. Frantically she waved him out of the way, as if unwilling that there should be two victims instead of one. It was the heroism of supreme unselfishness.

Her action had an extraordinary effect on the man. Suddenly aroused from his lethargy, he was instantly galvanized into life and action. The brain which an instant before had seemed paralyzed with terror worked now with the rapidity of a lightning flash. The horses were almost upon him when, with superhuman strength, he took hold of the tree stump on which he had been sitting and rolled it directly in the path of the on-coming carriage.

With a noise like thunder the terrified horses dashed past him, the poor girl inside the carriage standing up ready to leap, white as death. She saw the turn in the road and the abyss. She saw that nothing could save her, and with a look of despair on her white face she closed her eyes.

At that instant a pistol shot rang out, followed by a sound of tearing harness, the splintering of wood, the fall of a heavy body, and then all was still.

The carriage had stopped at the very brink of the chasm, the wheels having caught in the tree stump, which had acted effectually as a drag. One horse was standing amidst the wreck, trembling in every

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limb, its mate lay motionless in its traces, shot through the head.

Replacing the still smoking revolver in his pocket, the man lifted the girl gently from the carriage, and laying her on the roadside tried to restore her to consciousness. With water procured from a tiny stream that trickled out of the rocks he bathed her temples. After a few minutes she opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she demanded weakly, and staring about her as if not quite sure that she still belonged to this world. Then, looking up wonderingly at the stranger stooping over her, she inquired in French: "*Suis-je blessée?*"

"No," he answered in English. "You are a little shaken, a little frightened—that's all."

"Oh, you are English—perhaps American?" she said, sitting up and looking at him more closely.

"It was a close call," he said, ignoring her question. "A few steps more and your carriage, with you in it, would have gone over the precipice. See, there's all that remains of it."

He pointed to the carriage and to the dead horse.

"What saved me? I don't understand."

"I saw you coming. I couldn't stop the horses. I thought you were doomed. Just as the horses were on top of me I remembered my revolver. I snatched it from my pocket and shot one of your horses. He fell instantly, and his weight dragged the other horse back. I'm glad you had the good sense not to jump."

He assisted her to rise. Feeling still weak and ner-

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vous after the shock she leaned heavily on his arm. Suddenly it occurred to her that they were perfect strangers, and instinctively she drew away.

"I am very grateful to you," she murmured. "You saved my life. My name is Norman—Virginia Norman. I'm from New York, and am stopping with Mr. and Mrs. Parkes at Chamounix." Looking up at him inquiringly, she said: "You are——?"

He hesitated a moment, and then answered coldly:

"Stanton is my name—Robert Stanton." As if to discourage further questioning, he quickly asked: "How will you get back to Chamounix?"

But Virginia was interested in knowing more about her rescuer.

"Are you an American?" she persisted.

He made no answer, and frowned as if he resented the personal turn of the conversation. But she took no heed of his impatience.

"You look more American than English," she said.

In spite of his growing irritation, he could not help smiling.

"Am I to take this as a compliment or otherwise?"

"I meant it as a compliment. I prefer American men," she replied simply.

He laughed cynically, as if her opinion of men were without importance. Then, unceremoniously turning his back, he looked to see what was left of the carriage.

"How did it happen?" he demanded abruptly, without looking up.

"I'm an artist, and I wanted to sketch Mont Blanc

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from the Brévent. I left Chamounix early this morning. On the return journey we stopped at the little inn near the Châlet and my coachman got down from the box to procure some refreshment, leaving me alone in the carriage. Suddenly something startled the horses, and before I could seize the reins they were off. You know the rest."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You'd better do your sketching on foot next time. These Swiss roads are dangerous."

The sun by this time had completely disappeared behind the mountains. The deep shadows of twilight were fast stealing upon them from the depths of the valley.

"I don't know how to thank you enough," she said timidly. His abrupt manner rather intimidated her.

"Thanks are unnecessary. One would do that much for anyone."

She half expected to hear him add, "Especially for a pretty countrywoman," but he didn't. Instead, he added somewhat curtly:

"It's getting late. I'll have to fix things up as well as I can and get you back to Chamounix with the one horse."

While he busied himself disentangling the *debris* Virginia sat on the wall and watched him.

Stanton! Where had she heard that name before? It was connected in some way with Chamounix. Oh, yes, she remembered now! It was the name of the man with whom Mrs. Parkes had remonstrated for

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flogging his horse. Could this be he? He did not look brutal or cruel. His face was stern and there were determined lines about the mouth. It was rather the face of a man who had undergone great mental suffering. She thought him handsome. His lithe, straight figure, his dark, almost black hair, his pale face, only slightly tanned by the mountain air, appealed strongly to her artistic sense. His manner, too, interested her. It was different from that of other men she had met. She was accustomed to have gallant speeches made her. This man took no notice of her—in fact, was rather rude. It was such a novelty that she almost liked it.

Presently everything was ready for the start home. The surviving horse had been harnessed as well as possible to the broken carriage, and after Virginia had been made comfortable her taciturn companion climbed up on the box and picked up the reins. Thus they started, Spot barking furiously as he ran ahead.

Robert Forrester, with all his shortcomings, had never lacked a sense of humor. The absurdity of his present position appealed to him irresistibly. He did not know whether to laugh or to rage. He had come to Switzerland for peace and rest. Only an hour ago he was congratulating himself on his complete isolation from the inquisitive members of the American colony. Then, suddenly, his aloofness is rudely intruded upon, and greatly against his will he is forced to play the rôle of gallant knight to the maiden in

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distress. How his old pals would josh him if they could see him now! He ground his teeth and beneath his breath wished the girl miles away. However, there was no help for it. He would see her safely home and get away as quickly as possible. He also resented his lady passenger asking so many personal and embarrassing questions. Only Americans, he thought, can be guilty of such impertinence. The way to keep her quiet was to snub her. So he whipped up the horse in order to get through with the adventure as quickly as possible.

Virginia, meantime, sat back in the carriage enjoying the ride home in the cool, evening air. She was still trembling from the shock of the runaway, and when she thought of her narrow escape, and looked up at the man who had saved her from a horrible death, she felt as if she could throw her arms around his neck and kiss him. But there was something about his manner that chilled her and repelled her. His strange, silent demeanor puzzled her. She could not understand it. He was the first man she had ever met who had acted in this boorish way. If anything, his attitude was rather contemptuous, as if she were not worth wasting words upon. A quarter of an hour passed and he had not addressed her once. Desperate, she said:

"Have you been in Switzerland long?"

He shook his head, not taking the trouble to turn round.

"Not very long," he replied laconically.

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"Are you a New Yorker?"

"I used to be."

"Where do you live now?"

"Nowhere—anywhere," was the strange answer.

He gave the horse a vicious cut with the whip, as if the talk annoyed him, and unable to punish the real offender, he was venting his anger on the innocent animal.

Conversation under such conditions was plainly impossible, and Virginia made no further attempts, angry with herself for having tried. The man's a boor, she said to herself, and curling herself indignantly up in the corner of the carriage she closed her eyes and tried not to think of him.

Before long there was a glimpse of the lights of Chamounix shining through the trees, and a few minutes later the carriage was rattling along the Rue du Midi. Forrester half turned round on the box and asked her:

"Where do you live?"

Virginia started. She had grown so accustomed to his obstinate silence that now when he did address her she was startled.

"The Villa Cotterel, on the Martigny road," she replied.

"I will leave you there," he said, "and then take the carriage to the livery stable."

Presently they drew up at the Villa Cotterel, and getting down from the box he assisted Virginia to alight. She smiled and tried once more to break the

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ice, but his manner was as distant and frigid as ever.

"Won't you come in?" she said timidly. "I would like to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Parkes. They will thank you again. I can never forget the service you have rendered me."

"Oh, no," he said hastily. "I have business to attend to. You must excuse me."

He lifted his cap and climbed back on the box, leaving her on the sidewalk, hesitating and perplexed, not knowing what to say. She felt vexed and indignant at his treatment of her. The tears almost started to her eyes from humiliation. Yet she couldn't let him go away like that. She could not appear ungrateful, no matter how rude he was.

"We shall be delighted to see you. We are at home any day. Do come."

"You are very kind," he answered curtly. Again touching his cap, he flicked the horse with the whip and drove off.

In a few minutes the carriage was at the stable and the livery keeper had been informed of the accident and told where he could find the debris. This duty performed, "Mr. Stanton" proceeded to his hotel, and after refreshing ablutions and exchanging his dusty clothes for a dress coat he went down to dinner. He was hungry after his long walk and exciting experience, and had no difficulty in doing full justice to the elaborate *menu* provided by the expert *chef*.

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The delicate courses were washed down by a rare old claret, which the white-haired old waiter solemnly assured him was a private stock only uncorked for foreigners of title or special distinction. The compliment was obvious, and paved the way for an extra-sized gratuity. Forrester was popular in the hotel because he was a liberal spender. He always called for the most expensive and the best, had the arrogant airs of royalty itself, and swore roundly when things were not to his liking. The impression created was that he belonged to America's huge army of multimillionaires, and his wishes and whims were treated, therefore, with befitting respect.

The dinner, *recherché* as it was, did not succeed in restoring Forrester to good humor. His mood was so ugly that even the venerable waiter noticed it. Anxious to please, he said with an obsequious bow:

"Did Monsieur find everything to his taste?"

"No, I didn't!" he retorted savagely, rising abruptly from the table and throwing down a five-franc tip. "Everything was rotten. The *chef* ought to drown himself. I'm going to get out of here anyhow. I'm sick and tired of the d—— place!"

Leaving the garçon too bewildered to venture a word of protest, Forrester lit a cigar and strolled out on the terrace overlooking the surrounding country. The setting sun tipped the mountains with gold and the increasing darkness filled the valley with purple shadow. The scene was a glorious one, but it had no beauty for the American. Sitting chewing viciously

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at his cigar, he was fuming inwardly at the afternoon's ridiculous adventure.

Just like a thrilling chapter in a romantic novel, he muttered to himself. Nothing lacking—imminent peril, frail heroine, gallant rescuer. He was conscious of not having been very gallant. The girl, no doubt, thought him a savage. How could she understand his objections to being dragged into the lime-light? It meant the end of his stay in Chamounix. The story would be all over the place and he would be a marked man. People would begin to ask questions. For two years he had succeeded in preserving his incognito, he had managed to avoid travelling Americans. But now people would begin to ask who was he; they would scrape acquaintance, and if they were New Yorkers they might be shocked if they discovered that "Mr. Stanton" and Robert Forrester, the gambler, still under the cloud of suspicion of having murdered his uncle, were one and the same person. He must leave Chamounix at once. He would just as soon go as not. He was sick of Switzerland. He had only come for a rest, because his physician had warned him to take care. He had overtaxed his nervous system, and a collapse was inevitable unless he gave up, temporarily at least, the strenuous, enervating life he had been leading in all the cities of Europe—from Paris to Monte Carlo.

In possession now of plenty of money, having no one's wishes to consult but his own, Forrester had given himself a free rein. Far from being sobered

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by his recent terrible experience, he seemed to find keener pleasure than ever in the feverish, nerve-racking life. Satiated though he was with every vice and dissipation Broadway had to offer, when he went abroad there was so much that was novel, the attractions were so much more varied, numerous and potent that he seemed to have discovered a new world. He lacked moral strength to resist. All his good resolutions were scattered to the winds, and he quickly resumed his old manner of living, plunging into every form of dissipation, committing every excess, frequenting all the race courses and gambling hells of the Continent, making and losing thousands of dollars in the gratification of his passion for the green cloth.

He knew little of what was going on in America and he cared less. He did not expect ever to return there again. At intervals he heard from Billie Willets, who told him that the mystery of Mr. Forrester's murder was still unsolved. The police had dropped the case and the public had forgotten it.

His face grew stern as he thought with bitterness of his wanderings for the past two years. Virtually he was an outcast, with every man's hand turned against him. He had suffered unjustly. Public opinion had condemned him for a crime committed by another. Who could blame him if he felt bitter? Was it surprising that by plunging into gaiety and excitement he tried to forget—to blot the past out altogether. Through his mind flashed the events of the last two years—his benefactor's violent death, his own arrest



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and subsequent release, the impossibility of remaining in New York and living down his record, his sudden decision to leave America and live abroad.

He wondered idly if it would ever be found out who killed the old man. He knew Trehern was in Europe. He had caught a glimpse of him in Paris. It was possible, even probable—if he was the man—that he had come abroad to get rid of the stolen bonds. At one time he had thought of shadowing him and, if justified, of getting him arrested.

“Yet what interest have I in it?” he muttered. “It’s up to the New York police. I might have been willing to help them. They tried to fasten the crime on me. Now let them work it out alone.”

The following day he left Chamounix for Nice. Weary of mountain climbing, surfeited with scenery, he thirsted once more for the gaiety of the big centres where men and women, like foolish moths buzzing round a flame, congregate in the pursuit of pleasure. Reaching Monte Carlo at the height of the Riviera season, he began to gamble recklessly at the tables. Day after day, night after night, he sat there, winning and losing enormous sums, attracting crowds of visitors, who stood and watched his sensational play.

CHAPTER III

“CHAMOUNIX, *September 10, 1906.*

“**D**EAREST VIVIE: I have just had a thrilling experience and, incidentally, met a most extraordinary man. I'll tell you all the details when I see you. Suffice now to say that I was in a terrible runaway on the mountain and was saved from being dashed down a fearful precipice by a stranger—an American—who succeeded in stopping the carriage at the very brink of the chasm. I tremble yet when I think how very close I was to death. But the most remarkable part of my adventure was the hero. He was the strangest man I ever met—just the opposite of every hero one ever read of, and yet in some respects the most interesting and fascinating hero you could imagine. I never met a more mysterious person, or a ruder or more aggressively silent man. Even after saving my life at the risk of his own, he didn't take the slightest notice of me. In fact he treated me contemptuously, as a child who ought to be slapped and put to bed. I asked him to call, of course (I had to, don't you think so?), but he merely raised his cap, mumbled some excuse, and said 'good-bye' as indifferently as if saving people from a horrible death were the most commonplace thing.

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"The next day he disappeared altogether from Chamounix. Mr. Parkes called at his hotel to thank him officially, and they told him that Mr. Stanton—that's his name—had hurriedly left that morning for parts unknown. You remember Mrs. Parkes telling us about the man flogging the horse? Well, that was he. Mrs. Parkes said my description fitted him exactly. He has resided in New York and lives nowhere—that's all I could get out of him. Otherwise, he is a perfect mystery. He appears to have means, for he lives and dresses well, but nobody knows who he is or anything about him. He seems to avoid people purposely. Directly one makes his acquaintance he suddenly disappears.

"I know you'll laugh when you read this. You'll say that the prosaic Virginia is becoming romantic in her old age. I confess that the man's personality interested me greatly in spite of his almost repellent rudeness. He was tall, dark, handsome, and there was something about him that would make anyone turn to look at him a second time. I don't suppose I shall ever set eyes on him again, but for some reason I don't seem able to get him out of my mind. You'll think me awfully silly, dear. It isn't often I talk so much about a man, is it? But this man was different.

"Now to talk of more serious things. How are you, dear? Have you succeeded in getting the engagement in Brussels, or are you still doing ante-chamber in opera directors' offices? I often think of

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you and wish you were here enjoying this wonderful air. It would do you more good than to be wearing away your vitality, your young life, on what I fear is a useless ambition. I am only afraid that you will sap your strength and render yourself liable to serious sickness.

"I am enjoying Switzerland immensely. It is simply wonderful. All you have ever read and imagined of the beauty of its glorious mountains does not begin to come up to the reality. I am out with my sketch-book almost every day and have done some good work. Mr. and Mrs. Parkes are kindness itself. They won't hear of my returning to Paris. Next week we go to Mentone, and, of course, I shall take advantage of the opportunity to see the famous Monte Carlo. I may even risk a five-franc piece. You didn't know I was such a desperate gambler, did you?

"Good-bye, dear, for the present. Write soon.

"Your affectionate friend,

"VIRGINIA."

Two weeks later Virginia and her hosts, the Parkes, were on the shores of the blue Mediterranean, luxuriating in the delightful climate and the almost tropical vegetation of Mentone, basking amid the lemon trees and pines which cover the sunny slopes surrounding the ancient town. To the enthusiastic, imaginative American girl, fresh from dull, drab-colored New York, the beauty of the place was a revelation. It seemed to her like one of those Eastern countries one

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reads about in the Arabian Nights. The wondrous coloring of sea, sky and coast, the perfume of the breezes, the equable temperature, the gay, indolent life of the people, the evidence on all sides of wealth and luxury, the absence of any outward signs of human misery or sordidness, made of it a land of enchantment and poetry.

The first few days after her arrival she spent taking in the sights, driving along the sea-shore, where the hotels and foreigners form a town by themselves, then on foot up the mountain where dwell the native Mentonese, roaming for hours through steep, narrow and gloomy streets which spread over and cling to the mountain side, and on to the frowning castle which in days gone by had protected the Mentonese from sudden attacks from fierce Mediterranean pirates. The old ruin immediately appealed to her as a striking subject for a picture, affording fine opportunity for dramatic action and rich coloring. Her imagination peopled the crumbling battlements with armed men in mediæval dress standing ready to repel the savage invaders who landed from rakish galleys on the golden sands below and came swarming up the rocky incline with great brass rings in their ears and murder in their hearts. The following day, and for many days after, she returned to the spot with her sketch-book. So interested did she become in her work that she forgot all about Monte Carlo. It was only when Mrs. Parkes spoke of it, and suggested that they arrange a day to visit the Casino, that she re-

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membered how anxious she had been to see the world-famous gambling place. Of course she was eager to go. Why not to-morrow? So train schedules were quickly consulted and plans made to start the following morning.

If Mentone had filled Virginia with delight, the first view of Monte Carlo aroused her to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. Little wonder, she mused, as she gazed, fascinated, upon its natural and artificial beauties, that this spot was called the paradise of Europe and attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors from every corner of the globe. It was a vision of fairyland. Built on rocky slopes and set like a glittering jewel in an ocean of turquoise, it presented a particularly lovely spectacle that fine summer afternoon. Its splendid Casino, a large white building of artistic design, dominated magnificently laid-out gardens in which waved a wealth of green palm trees, shrubbery, plants of every kind, relieved by the rich color of thousands of blood-red geraniums in full bloom. Just beyond, along the lower ground of the sheltered bay, stretched the village of Condamine with its orange gardens, its perfume factories and its chapel dedicated to Saint Devota, the patron saint of Monaco. Further in the distance, on the summit of a bold headland, was the picturesque town of Monaco itself.

Ascending from the railroad station in the elevator, they were soon on a level with the gardens, and when they stepped from the car a gay and animated scene confronted them. The terrace was crowded, as on

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every afternoon when fine weather tempts the most inveterate gambler to escape from the hot, stifling gaming-rooms to breathe the pure invigorating air without. Hundreds of well dressed men and women, representing every nation on earth—French, Americans, English, Germans, Italians, Russians, Turks—were promenading or sitting at little café tables under the sweet-scented trees, some sipping tea, others drinking beer or absinthe, all laughing and chatting as they listened to the melodious waltzes played by a Hungarian band and enjoyed the balmy breezes that were wafted in from the sea.

Virginia was surprised to see so many people sitting idle with apparently nothing to do.

"I thought they came here to gamble," she said.

"They do," laughed Mr. Parkes, "but they can't gamble all the time. The rooms are fearfully hot. Some come out here to cool off. Others have lost all their money. Look at that young woman drinking absinthe. Notice how dejected she looks. She has probably lost all her money and is taking that poisonous stuff to drown her chagrin. To-morrow she'll pawn her jewelry and play again. When that's gone, she'll apply for her fare home, and return where she belongs, a sadder but wiser woman. Come, let's go and see what's going on inside the Casino."

Having secured admission cards, without which no visitor may enter the establishment known as "the wickedest place on earth," they made their way through the broad main entrance, following the marble cor-

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ridor to the gaming-rooms, a series of richly decorated halls with lofty ceilings and polished floors. Although it was still early in the day, a hundred electroliers were burning brightly as if it were night, the outside sunshine being carefully excluded by heavy black and crimson curtains. In the centre and on both sides of the salons were the roulette and trente et quarante tables, each surrounded by its own set of players and onlookers, some sitting, the majority standing, all pressing eagerly forward, six rows deep, anxious to see, keenly intent on watching the vicissitudes of the game which for the lucky few meant fortune, for the many ruin.

The rooms were full of people, men and women, and the air vitiated and suffocating from lack of ventilation had a sickening odor of mingled perfume and perspiration. It was an oddly-assorted, incongruous crowd, a bizarre democracy born of the common greed for gold, all classes of society voluntarily putting themselves for the nonce on terms of equality in their mad lust for quick-gotten wealth. Proud duchesses elbowed Parisian *cocottes*. British peers hobnobbed with shopkeepers who dropped their "h's." There were pretty young women fashionably gowned whose faces reddened and then turned white as they risked and lost a louis; decrepit old hags with withered necks blazing with costly gems who came every day and sat in the same seat, pricking little cards held in their claw-like hands in the hope of finding some system which would break the bank; American millionaires,

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amusing themselves while their yachts were anchored in the roadstead below; French *littérateurs* studying human nature; German scientists; adventurers; criminals of all nations—a few come out of curiosity, most of them incurable victims of the gambling habit.

Virginia noticed that the women carried little bags in which they kept the gold and bank notes which, from time to time, they placed on numbers they expected to win. Their faces were flushed and their eyes had an unnatural glitter from excitement. When they won they laughed hysterically, when they lost they were tearful and peevish. The men, under better self-control, took the decree of the wheel more philosophically. Their lips compressed, every muscle quivering from suppressed emotion, some were elated as if drunk with champagne, others dejected to the point of self-destruction.

They were the gamblers—degenerate men and women, degraded to the state of the primeval animal, stripped of culture's thin veneer, each displaying without shame his secret vice, his particular ugly trait of character—the tricky man his trickiness, the shrewish woman her shrewishness, each preying upon the other, quarrelling over paltry pieces of gold like famished jackals snarling over a bone.

Virginia felt a sensation of disgust. She had laughingly announced her intention of risking a five-franc piece herself, but when she saw the terrible hold which gambling had taken on all these people she drew back terrified. She could understand how

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gambling might make men its slaves, but to see women thus unsex themselves, abandoning themselves to the passion of gain, their breath panting, their eyes starting, their hands shaking—all for what? The getting of a few louis! It was nauseating!

They passed into the central *Salle*, where a great crowd was gathered around the roulette table. It was impossible to see anything of the play because the spectators were pressing round, half-a-dozen rows deep. Above the buzz of voices arose the monotonous cry of the croupier:

"Faites vos jeux!"

Virginia wondered what the special attraction could be at that particular table and she pressed forward to see. A bystander amiably explained:

"There's been extraordinary play at this table for the last week," he replied. "A man has been having a phenomenal run of luck. He's already broken the bank several times. I think he's an American. Yesterday he won a hundred thousand francs. To-day he's winning again.

The Parkes were eager to see the lucky American and tried to get a glimpse of the fortunate player. Suddenly Virginia, who had managed to squeeze in closer than her companions, fell back with an exclamation. She had caught sight of the successful gambler, a tall, dark man, with black hair and a pale face. He did not see her, but instantly she recognized him. It was Mr. Stanton, the mysterious silent man. Her face red, and trembling with excitement, she exclaimed:

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"Who do you think it is?"

"Who?" demanded Mr. and Mrs. Parkes.

"Mr. Stanton—the man who saved me on the mountain."

It was Mrs. Parkes' turn now to get excited. She would remember him, she said. She was grateful to him, of course, for saving Virginia, but she could not forgive him for flogging the horse. After a glance she said:

"Yes, that's the man. That's Mr. Stanton."

He was sitting in the centre of the table, facing them. But he saw nothing of what was going on around him, indifferent to the sensation he was creating, completely engrossed in a study of the roulette board, placing large-sized bets on various combinations of numbers. He seemed to be following a system, for every now and then he would stop to consult a little card pricked all over with pin holes. His face was pale and haggard, yet not from excitement, for outwardly he was the coolest person at the table. His lips were bloodless and his eyes had a fixed, glassy stare, while his fingers toyed nervously with the gold and crisp bank notes, representing the day's winnings, which were piled up at his right. The other players eagerly watched his every move, so that they, too, might make similar bets and profit by his luck.

The ball was already running within the fast spinning wheel when "Mr. Stanton" suddenly changed his mind as to the disposition of his wagers. Quickly, and before any other player could follow suit, he swept all his money on to the number 26.

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"*Rien ne va plus!*" warned the croupier.

Anxiously, breathlessly, every one watched the flight of the ivory ball until with a sharp metallic click it fell into the socket.

"*Vingt-six! Noir, pair et passe.*"

A thrill ran round the table. The American had won twenty thousand francs. If his luck continued the bank would soon be broken.

Herself unable to resist sharing in the general excitement, Virginia watched the American closely. If he had interested her on the mountain, his personality completely fascinated her now. There was a strange look in his face—a hard, reckless, indifferent, defiant look. It was easy to see by the contemptuous manner in which he stuffed the crisp notes in his pocket that the money he had won meant nothing to him. He was perhaps a rich man, and it was the excitement of the play that he enjoyed. Yet that hardly explained his sullen mood, his air of mystery. He looked like a man who was unhappy, lonely, a man in whom all ambition, all the nobler impulses were dead.

"I wonder what he is and what his history is?" she murmured to herself.

"*Faites vos jeux, Messieurs!*"

The American was again consulting his card, and after a moment's thought he pushed a pile of notes on the number 11, with the maximum on the red.

The ball rattled on its course followed by a hundred eager eyes, and everybody gasped as it stopped with a click and the croupier announced:

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"Onze! Rouge, impair et passe."

The American had won forty thousand francs. The excitement now was intense. The news had spread to the other tables, and people came hurrying from all parts of the room. The croupiers quickly made up their accounts, and finding that there were not enough funds to continue they arose. The onlookers understood, and broke into applause. The American had broken the bank.

The other players crowded round him, congratulating him on his luck. He smiled coldly, pocketed his winnings, amounting to over 100,000 francs, and, lighting a cigarette, rose from the table and sauntered off, followed by hundreds of envious eyes.

Virginia thought that he might recognize her as he moved away, but he did not appear to have seen her. After his strange behavior at Chamounix she was inclined to believe that he purposely avoided her, and the thought that it might be an intentional snub so incensed her that she determined to dismiss him forthwith from her mind.

Mrs. Parkes complained of the heat of the rooms and suggested that they go outside and have tea on the terrace. The motion was carried, and in a few minutes all three were seated at a little table under the trees watching the crowd. Mrs. Parkes was scandalized at what she had seen, and had just begun a vigorous denunciation of gambling in general and of Monte Carlo in particular, when suddenly Virginia discovered that her fan was missing. It being a pres-

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ent from her sister Lily, she would not have lost it for anything, and for a moment she was in a state of consternation. She thought she must have dropped it inside the rooms while watching the play.

Mr. Parkes volunteered to go in search of it, but Virginia insisted on going herself. Making her way back through the main entrance, she was hurrying along the corridor in the direction of the grand *salon* when she accidentally bumped into someone. Murmuring an apology in French, she was hastening on, when a man's voice exclaimed in English:

"Why, it's Miss Norman—the lady of the runaway!"

She looked up. The mysterious American was looking down at her, the hard expression of his face softened somewhat by a smile of recognition. She was so surprised and confused that for a moment she was speechless. Quickly regaining her self-composure, she put out her hand and said:

"How do you do? I'm very glad to meet you again. We were sorry you left Chamounix so suddenly. We saw you playing roulette this afternoon. Are you always as lucky?"

He shrugged his shoulders, and frowned as if the topic were distasteful. Ignoring her question, he asked:

"What are you doing at Monte Carlo? This is a place for gamblers, not for artists."

"I came out of curiosity," answered Virginia frankly, "and now I've seen it I don't think I shall

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ever want to come again. One must see everything, you know, otherwise one can't know how base and degraded humanity is."

"You're not here alone, are you?"

"No, I came with my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Parkes. They're outside, taking tea on the terrace. I've lost my fan somewhere in here and come back to look for it."

"Let me help you," he said.

They entered the grand *salon* together and began the search. But the fan was nowhere to be seen. The attendants shook their heads and suggested that some not too scrupulous visitor had picked it up and carried it off. Virginia was in despair, and had about reconciled herself to its loss when another attendant volunteered the welcome information that such an article had been found and taken to the offices of the Administration for safe keeping. This necessitated another trip through endless corridors and offices.

"I'm afraid that this is very tiresome to you," stammered Virginia.

"Everything's tiresome—life and people," he replied cynically. "I'm not likely to be more bored with you than I would be if I were alone."

Had anyone else made such an answer Virginia would have quickly resented it, but coming from her mysterious American she rather expected it. Certainly he was original. There was nothing conventional about him. That's why he interested her.

"Why did you leave Chamounix so suddenly?"

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she asked presently. "We wanted to thank you, but found you had gone."

"I never stay long in any place. I must be constantly on the move. My temperament demands it."

She glanced at him sideways, wondering what that temperament he spoke about might be, trying to find some indication as to his profession and social position. She judged him to be a professional man—perhaps a physician or a lawyer—by his seriousness and authoritative tone and by his hands, which were white and shapely. But his pale face, absent-minded stare and rather melancholy expression revealed nothing. It was an impenetrable mask that effectually concealed the soul. Neither spoke for a few moments. Breaking the awkward silence, he asked:

"What do you think of Monte Carlo?"

"The place itself is beautiful—a spot such as one might picture Paradise to be," she answered quickly. "But the gambling is horrible! Of course," she added quickly, with a laugh, "it doesn't hurt you or me. We are here only to see. You play only for amusement. But to some of these gamblers it seems to be the only thing they have left in life. It is pitiful to watch some of the people one sees at the tables. They are slaves to a terrible vice. One has only to watch their faces to see what a hold it has on them and how it has debased them. They have scarcely any resemblance left to human beings. Gambling has shattered their self-respect and corroded their soul. Nothing

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else interests them—home ties, ambition, love, all that is dead to them forever.”

He looked at her in amazement, not understanding her uncompromising attitude. All the women he knew enjoyed Monte Carlo immensely. They thought it awfully jolly, just the kind of place for a good time. Its tragic aspect had never occurred to him.

“You take things seriously, don’t you?” he said.

“Life is serious, don’t you think so?” she replied.

They had now reached the lost property bureau, where the fan was found awaiting a claimant. Her mission now over, Virginia turned to thank her escort.

“Won’t you let me introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Parkes?”

“Thank you,” he said, “I’d rather not. You see I’m peculiar. I don’t like people. It bores me to have to talk.”

“I’m aware of that,” she smiled.

“That’s because I have no one to talk to,” he explained. “That is, no one whose talk I care to listen to. It makes all the difference, doesn’t it?”

“Of course,” laughed Virginia.

“You thought me very rude the other day?” he went on.

Virginia smiled.

“I won’t admit that,” she replied with a laugh. “I thought you were very quiet. I could not quite understand you.”

“Few people do,” he answered laconically. “Sometimes I don’t understand myself.”

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"You said you were a New Yorker, I think?" she said interrogatively. She was burning with curiosity to know, and as he appeared more communicative now than the day when she first made his acquaintance she was determined to find out.

"I've lived most of my life there," was the not altogether satisfying answer.

"A professional man, I presume?" she went on, inwardly astonished that she had the temerity to continue questioning him in this manner.

But he did not seem to mind. Apparently he was in a good humor, for he smiled as she had not yet seen him smile, and for the first time she remarked that he was unusually good looking. He appeared younger now than when she had seen him on the mountain. He had fine teeth, black wavy hair, and his eyes, no longer downcast and sullen, flashed with youthful fires.

"Nothing so useful, I assure you," he laughed. "I'm nothing. I'm one of the earth's parasites, with nothing to do but kill time and spend money. A noble occupation in life, is it not? Do you wonder I'm ashamed to acknowledge it?"

She liked him the better for this speech. It showed at least that he had the proper spirit, that he had ideals and ambitions, even if circumstances had chained him down to a life of inaction. He was probably a man who had inherited money.

"So you don't approve of gambling?" he asked, with a cynical laugh.

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"I certainly do not," she answered emphatically. "It saps men's lives, kills their better nature, paralyzes every worthy impulse. It is a natural instinct in all of us to accomplish something in life, to be useful in some way. For instance, I want to become a celebrated painter; I have a friend in Paris who wants to be a famous singer. Ambition makes life worth living. Its only his ambition, his wish to achieve, that distinguishes man from the brute. What ambition can the gambler have? None. His life is wasted. He is of no use to society. On the contrary, he is a menace."

He listened in silence, and then in a tone in which sarcasm and bitterness mingled, he said:

"Perhaps you're right. I never looked upon it in that way. So, in your opinion, gamblers are no good?"

"Men who don't lead decent, respectable lives, who don't contribute their just share to the progress of the race, can be no good—to the world or to themselves. They are under a curse. They have forfeited the world's respect as well as their own. The world would be better off without them."

"I guess you're right," he said after a pause. In a changed tone, in which there was a tinge of bitterness, he added: "That's why I come here—to gamble, to forget! I never speak in this way to strangers. There is something about you that makes me talk."

He spoke rapidly, like one who is thinking aloud rather than if he intended to pay her a compliment.

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Virginia glanced at him, surprised. She began to understand. There was something in this man's life that had embittered it.

"You are unhappy," she said gently.

"Good-bye," he said, ignoring her remark and extending his hand as if he wished her to go before he was tempted to say anything further.

"Am I right?" she persisted.

"Perhaps," he said with a faint smile. "It might have been different if someone had spoken to me like that years ago. You are the kind of woman the world wants. I'm glad now I saved you from the precipice. Good-bye."

He lifted his hat and walked away.

When Virginia returned to the terrace it was nearly seven o'clock and beginning to grow dark. Mr. and Mrs. Parkes had searched everywhere for her and were becoming seriously alarmed.

"Wherever have you been, Virginia?" exclaimed Mrs. Parkes.

"I've been converting the heathen," she laughed gaily.

CHAPTER IV

THE days passed, and the Parkes still lingered at Mentone. The original plan had been to stop only for a week, but the climate proved so bracing and the beauty of the environs so attractive that the departure was indefinitely postponed. Virginia, fearing to impose on her hosts' hospitality, wanted to return to Paris, but they would not hear of it, arguing with reason that her health would benefit by the longer rest. So she, too, had remained, and what with almost daily drives through the glorious country side and the gathering of further valuable material for her sketch-book, enjoyed her stay to the full. She had not returned to Monte Carlo. One visit to that gambling hell was enough. She would have liked to see more of the mysterious Mr. Stanton, and she had reason to believe that he was a constant frequenter of the rooms, but she felt intuitively that she could not return there without sacrificing some of her self-respect. So, dismissing Monte Carlo and Mr. Stanton both from her mind, she took short trips with Mrs. Parkes to San Remo and other places along the coast. On other days she would go out alone with her sketch-book, and climbing to the heights above the old town continue the picture already commenced of the weather-beaten fortress.

One afternoon, about a week after the visit of Monte

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Carlo, Virginia started early from the house, intending to put in some good work on her picture, being anxious to finish it before returning to Paris. The day was a glorious one. The warm air, tempered by a cool breeze that blew in from the bay, was exhilarating as champagne. The sea, with scarcely a ripple on its heaving bosom, stretched away to the Eastern horizon, a wide expanse of shimmering blue. Overhead in the deep azure of the cloudless sky flocks of Mother Carey's chickens circled with shrill cries. Not a human being was in sight to mar the marvellous beauty of the view. On the rugged mountain side, strewn with primeval rocks and wild vegetation, with the frowning walls of the mediæval castle adding to the picturesqueness of the background, one might imagine oneself living centuries ago, before the virginal beauty of Nature was spoiled by the devastating process called civilization.

As she reclined in the luxuriant grass, basking in the warm sunshine, Virginia closed her eyes, abandoning herself momentarily to the voluptuousness of the place and scene. A dreamy languor crept through her whole being. How good life was! How delightful to get away from the dust and turmoil of the city and the commonplaces of every-day routine, and commune thus secretly with Mother Earth! It was at such moments as these, when the world appeared in its fairest aspect, that she experienced a vague, indefinable feeling of dissatisfaction, as if there were still something lacking. In town she had her work

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to distract her attention, to occupy her time and mind. But in the country it was different. She had leisure to think and yearn for something which was not there, and which her woman's instinct told her was wanting to complete her happiness. What it was she hardly knew. Her life had been singularly free from sexual disturbance, yet when the world seemed filled with the joy of life, when the birds sang gleefully as they wooed and mated in the trees, she realized how lonely her own existence was. True, she was devoted to her work, her art. She wanted to become famous. She wanted people to say: "Have you seen Virginia Norman's picture?" "That's the Virginia Norman who painted such and such a picture." Perhaps it was a foolish ambition, perhaps when she had attained it and became famous she would find it an empty and unsatisfying glory after all. Would it give her as much real happiness as if she had married and known the joys of domestic life—home, husband and children?

It was when she was in this mood, when she feared that the time she gave to painting was so much wasted energy, that she was filled with strange longings, a cry went up from her heart for someone to love, a man's strong arm to which she could cling as she journeyed on along life's journey. An uncomfortable feeling came over her as she pictured herself a cranky old maid, embittered with the world, yet herself only to blame, because she had disregarded Nature's laws. Yet it was not her fault. She would not marry a man she could not love. Her proud spirit revolted at the very thought. The right man had never presented

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himself. Would he ever present himself? Her heart would surely tell her when he did appear. Certainly she had never yet met a man whom she could think of in that way.

Inwardly reproaching herself for wasting valuable time in foolish day dreams, she opened her sketch-book and set to work, yet in spite of herself her thoughts persisted in dwelling on the emptiness of her future life as her pencil rapidly filled in the outlines of the crumbling castle. For ten minutes she worked industriously, and she was so absorbed that she did not hear someone approaching. Suddenly she was alarmed by hearing a man's heavy step close behind her. Quickly turning, she saw "Mr. Stanton."

"How you frightened me!" she exclaimed.

He bent forward and inspected her drawing critically.

"You have talent," he said.

Virginia gave a little nervous laugh. She was so taken by surprise that she was at a loss what to say.

"I had no idea that a living soul was within a mile of me," she said. "However did you happen to come this way?"

He noticed her embarrassment, and smiled as if he rather enjoyed taking her unawares.

"I drove over from Nice," he explained. "This hill and old castle attracted me, so I left my carriage and climbed up."

"Do you like going out alone like that—isn't it tiresome having no one to talk to?"

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"I notice that you are alone," he retorted.

"That's different," she replied. "I'm working, but you're always alone—at Chamounix, Monte Carlo, here."

He made no reply for a moment, then he said:

"I prefer to be alone—one's thoughts are often the best companions." Changing the conversation, he asked:

"Why haven't you been to Monte Carlo since?"

"How do you know I haven't?" was her quick retort.

He saw the trap and smiled.

"I would have seen you," he said. Then he added frankly: "I was looking for you."

Her face reddened. She was sorry she had yielded to her mischievous impulse to put the question. It was only in fun, of course, but practically she had forced the compliment from him. He would think less of her for it. Anxious to lead the conversation into less personal channels, she said:

"I have no time for Monte Carlo, even if the Casino had an attraction for me, which it certainly had not. I told you that I despise gambling and gamblers. I want to finish this picture before I return to Paris. I must get back to work. I've been idle long enough. My holiday has lasted longer than I expected."

He listened to her in silence, and his glance went from her face to the soft green grass where she was sitting. It looked cool and inviting, and he was hot and tired after his climb up the hill.

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"I wonder whether you'd mind if I sat down here a bit?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Certainly not—by all means," she replied lightly. "It will be nice to have some one to talk to me."

"But I don't talk," he replied, as he sank down on the grass near her. "I never talk unless I have something to say."

"Have you anything to say now?" she asked.

"No—not at this minute. It's idiotic to force conversation for the mere sake of talking."

Virginia could not repress a smile. He was certainly the most unconventional man she had ever met. Laughingly she said:

"Then I shall have to do the talking. How long do you expect to remain here?"

"Till the place wearies me."

"And then?"

"Then—I shall wander on."

"Where?"

"I don't know."

The answer was so abrupt and strange, and his tone so peculiar that the girl looked up in surprise. The smile had disappeared from his face, once more his voice was harsh, his manner cold and repellent. The change was so sudden that Virginia was puzzled how to account for it. She feared that she had said something to offend him. Timidly, she kept on working without speaking, and he, too, was silent. Presently he said:

"So you despise gamblers?"

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"Oh, yes, I detest gambling and vice of any kind. I've known so much misery and unhappiness come of it. There was a particularly sad case in New York recently. You may have heard of it—the Forrester murder."

At that moment, fortunately, Virginia was intent on her drawing, or she would have been startled at her companion's appearance. He had half risen from his reclining position. His eyes, with widely dilated pupils, were staring fiercely at her. His face was of a deathly pallor. But Virginia was serenely unconscious of the agitation her words had produced. Still engrossed in her work, she went on:

"I never saw the nephew—this Robert Forrester—but by all accounts he was a dreadful character. Most people are still convinced he killed his uncle, although the coroner's jury failed to hold him. He disappeared from New York. You must have heard of the case."

"Yes—I've heard something about it," he muttered.

"He was a gambler—this Robert Forrester," she went on. "His passion for gambling was his ruin. He was vicious, too, and everything that is bad. Yet somehow, do you know, I've always felt a certain sympathy for him."

He leaned eagerly forward, and in a voice that he kept under control only with difficulty he said:

"What? You felt sympathy for a man you never met, a perfect stranger, a man with such a detestable reputation?"

"Yes," she replied, without interrupting her work.

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"I felt sorry for him. No man is so utterly bad that there is not some good in him, and this man seemed to have the whole world against him. Besides, what I heard of his personality interested me. It is a pet theory of mine that we are not always responsible for our actions, good or bad. You or I, for instance; if we had been brought up in different circumstances—if the vicious or criminal germ, as it were, were in us before we were born, we, too, would be depraved beings—you a criminal, I a bad woman, perhaps. This Robert Forrester's vices, his passion for gambling, may have been inherited from some forgotten ancestor. He never knew his mother. Any boy who has not a mother's care and guidance is likely to go wrong. Who knows, if the influences surrounding his boyhood had been different, or if later in life he had met a good woman whom he could have married, perhaps all that wouldn't have happened, and to-day he would be a respected member of society instead of what he is—an outcast."

"Yes, poor devil! God knows he's been punished enough!"

Virginia quickly looked up.

"You know him?" she asked.

"Oh, no," he answered hastily. "Only I agree with you. I'm sorry for him."

"I'm glad to hear that," she said. "It proves that you are charitable. You are the first man I've met who has had a good word to say about him."

Their eyes met accidentally, and she noticed a

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strange wistful expression in his, as if he wanted to say something and yet dare not. A long silence followed, and she went on with her picture. At last he said:

"Tell me something about yourself. You are not studying in Paris alone, are you?"

"Oh, no. I am with a friend—a singer. We have a little apartment."

She told him all about the art school, of her ambition to exhibit at next year's Salon, of Vivie's beautiful voice and her plucky struggle to win recognition as an opera singer in spite of almost insurmountable obstacles. She made him laugh by a vivid account of the bohemian suppers which they gave once a week, and to which all their friends came without invitation, everyone bringing something to eat or drink, each contributing his or her share to the evening's entertainment. If he ever came to Paris, he must certainly come too. She would be delighted to introduce him as her rescuer. He in turn told of his travels—the lands he had visited, the strange things he had seen, and thus they chatted on until the sun, rapidly falling in the West, warned Virginia that it was time to go home. She closed her sketch-book and he assisted her to her feet.

"May I see you home?" he asked. "It isn't quite safe in these parts for a girl to be alone. My carriage is at the foot of the cliff. I will drive you to the house."

They went down the mountain path together, he

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helping her in the difficult places. Once she put her foot on a loose stone, and she would have fallen had he not caught her round the waist.

"You had better take my arm," he said. "It will be safer." Smiling, he added: "We must take care of you, you know—for art's sake."

Timidly, she clung to his arm, thrilled with a delicious sensation of having someone to support and protect her. When, finally, they reached the road, he assisted her into the carriage, and after giving the directions to the coachman he got in by her side. When they reached the house Virginia insisted on his coming in to meet Mrs. Parkes, who, she said, would be delighted to make his acquaintance. But he declined, asking to be excused, and when she persisted he refused point blank, rather curtly, showing again some of his former impatience and irritability. She was sorry, for it gave a rather uncomfortable finish to a most agreeable afternoon.

She feared that her insistence had annoyed him and that she would not see him again. But she was mistaken. The next day, shortly after she had returned to the old castle and commenced work, he re-appeared.

"It was too tempting. I simply couldn't resist coming," he said frankly.

"I thought you had too strong a character to yield easily to temptation," she laughed.

"I was never tried in this way before."

"Why aren't you playing at the Casino? Has your luck deserted you?"

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"Perhaps I have come to the conclusion that my luck is elsewhere," he replied.

She did not know what he meant, but the way in which he said it made it sound like a caress. She flushed, and an awkward pause followed.

"Why wouldn't you meet Mrs. Parkes yesterday?" she demanded after a pause.

"I hate making new acquaintances—that is the only reason."

"But they want to meet you. They think it strange. Mrs. Parkes would like you to come and dine with us. Won't you come?"

"Sometime—yes."

But she refused to be put off by any such vague promise, and would not desist until he had agreed to dine with them the following Saturday. Then, having gained her point, she laughed and chatted with him as if they had been friends for years. They knew each other pretty well by this time. The wall of reserve was broken down on both sides. She told him all about her girlhood and her father's death, her going to New York, and her devotion to her sister's children. Certainly, if he came to New York, he must not fail to come and see them. She expected to return to Paris in three weeks at the latest. Possibly they would meet again there. She loved Paris, although of late it had lost much of its charm owing to the American invasion, one hearing nothing but English on the boulevards and in the shops.

When they reached the Parkes cottage that even-

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ing her companion's scruples about meeting strangers had vanished. Mrs. Parkes was delighted with him, and tactfully refrained from making allusion to the day she first made his acquaintance. Two days later he dined with them, and when he had gone Mrs. Parkes said :

" Virginia, you ought to set your cap at him. He's handsome, rich, and I think he's head over heels in love with you."

" What nonsense ! " retorted Virginia, growing very red. " He talks to me because there's no one else here to interest him."

But her careless, indifferent words belied what was in her heart. To an extent which she herself did not appreciate, this man had entered into her life. She looked for his coming, and there was a sense of emptiness and loneliness when he was gone. She tried to avoid him, deciding to stop her visits to the hill top, but when it came to doing so she lacked the courage. She was happy in his company ; why should she flee from him ? He was almost constantly in her thoughts. Always she had before her his face, with its serious, wistful expression. Who was this man that he should exercise such a subtle influence over her ? His commanding tone, the air of authority in his manner, fascinated her. When with him, she felt that she was in the presence of a master whose will she must obey without question.

So the time went by, their acquaintance gradually ripening into an intimacy as delightful as it was peri-

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lous. The weather continued to be ideal, and every afternoon he came over from Nice to take her for a drive or to suggest a long ramble along the coast. It never occurred to her that there might be danger in these solitary excursions with a man who, after all, was a stranger, about whose antecedents she not only knew absolutely nothing, but who had succeeded in throwing the veil of mystery over himself and his past life. It never entered her mind to doubt his perfect honorability. She thought she knew a gentleman when she saw one, and he was unmistakably that. In fact, the oftener she saw him the more she liked him. Each day she understood him better, each day she succeeded in raising higher the mask under which, for some mysterious reason, he had hidden his real self. To her he appeared generous, chivalrous, high minded. He had personal courage and great will power, two qualities she especially admired in a man. Of faults she detected none. He played at the Casino, but apparently only for diversion, and as to his alleged cruelty, she had seen no evidence of it. Thus in her mind there slowly took form the idea that at last, after all these years of waiting, she had met the one man she could care for.

To Forrester himself this romance was a novel sensation. It was the one thrill he had never known in a career which had tasted of every pleasure life has to offer. He had never taken a serious interest in the opposite sex, his life having been too unsettled, too demoralized to make domestic ties possible. Given

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up to fiercer pleasures, he had regarded all such sentimental interests as mawkish and trivial. Women of a certain degraded type had appealed to his sensuality, but the one thing that most men prize—the unselfish love of a virtuous girl—he had never sought for or cared about.

The first time he saw Virginia—the day of the accident—he had paid no attention to her. Embittered against the world as he was, she meant nothing to him. On the contrary, she rather irritated him, reminding him as she did of that New York from which he had fled. When he met her again at Monte Carlo he was about to pass by without attracting her attention when a voice within him told him to address her. They became better acquainted. She interested him. Her frankness and sincerity, her high moral tone and sane outlook on life had the effect of a tonic and opened to him a world he had never known—a world of decency and self-respect. He felt himself less degraded when with her. Her mere presence seemed to lift him from the moral abyss into which years of moral turpitude had dragged him, to heights bright with the promise of a new life. His gloomy morbidness, the thoughts of self-destruction which had often come upon him, were dispelled at the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice. Slowly it dawned upon him that if ever the past was to be wiped out, if he himself could hope for moral regeneration, it would only be through this woman.

One day she said to him with affected indifference :

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"To-morrow I return to Paris."

She glanced sideways at him, but his face was averted.

"So soon?" he replied coldly.

Both were silent, neither willing that the other should know.

"I wonder if we shall ever meet again?" she said lightly.

"It is very possible," he answered in the same careless tone. "My plans include a trip to Paris next month."

CHAPTER V

WHEN Virginia reached Paris after a fatiguing journey there was no one to welcome her to the apartment in the Rue Galvani, Vivie having already left for Brussels, where she had succeeded in securing an engagement at the Théâtre de la Monnaie. The rooms looked cheerless and depressing in the absence of the vivacious little singer who had been the life of the place, and it was with a feeling akin to dismay that Virginia looked forward to the months of toil without a companion with whom to associate and exchange confidences when the working hours were over.

Harry Graham called the day following her arrival and told her everything of interest that had happened during her absence. Vivie, he said, had gone to Brussels, delighted at the idea of singing leading rôles at such an important Opera House, although she was far from well, having caught a severe cold just previous to her departure. He was interested to hear of Virginia's travels, especially of her adventure in Switzerland, of which he had heard.

Virginia told him all about the runaway, giving a graphic account of her narrow escape and the manner in which she was saved, but refrained from going into particulars regarding her rescuer. Graham noticed the reticence.

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"But the man," he said. "Who is he? A New Yorker, I understand. Perhaps I know him."

"His name is Stanton. I don't think you know him. He's been away from America a long time—travelling in Europe."

"What sort of a chap is he—a gentleman?"

"He seemed so," she replied carelessly, as if it did not really matter to her whether Mr. Stanton was a gentleman or not. Then adroitly changing the topic, she got Graham interested in her vivid description of the sights at Monte Carlo.

The next few days were spent in settling down once more to the old routine, making a round of the studios, engaging models for the big picture which she hoped to send to next year's Salon. Then came this characteristic letter from Vivie:

"BRUSSELS, *October 24, 1906.*

"*Dearest:*

"Here I am, a full-fledged prima donna, and my dago director simply raves over my voice. He declares I am the most wonderful creature—he said artiste!—he ever heard, which perhaps only proves that his experience is limited, *n'est ce pas?* Really, I don't know whether he is jollyng me or not, but I am certainly IT! There are pictures of me in the papers and long-haired scribblers call at my humble boarding-house all day long. I only have a hall bedroom—a six by twelve—so I have to receive these amiable knights of the pen in the public parlor. As my suc-

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cess depends on their good-will, I'm sweet as pie to them, expounding with the utmost gravity my views on the operatic art and dazzling them with the wondrous story of my glorious career, till I have them all dippy. I made my début in 'Lucia.' You can imagine how scared I was! Happily, everything went well, although something terrible happened in the second act, in the big scene with my tenor lover—a portly apoplectic person weighing at least 300 pounds—who ripped his hose as he attempted to scale the wall.

"There's no immediate prospect of my making enough money to retire upon—Sembrich and Caruso to the contrary notwithstanding. My valuable services are remunerated by a grateful director at the munificent rate of two hundred and fifty francs (\$50) a month, or about four dollars a performance! For this princely salary I am expected to sing at least three times a week (sometimes more often when other singers are ill) and be always on tap for rehearsals at a moment's notice. I see my financial finish. All I earn will about pay carfare and my laundry bill. I guess Uncle will have to get busy and send me more money, or else I'll have to take in sewing by day so as to be able to wallow in vocal trills by night.

"How's your mysterious hero? Has he proposed? If not, why not? Of course I read between the lines of your last letter. You're desperately in love, and he's liable to get on his knees at any moment. You always were a lucky girl. Nobody makes love to me

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—except stage love. Be careful not to let him slip through your fingers. Men are so fickle! I sing it so often that I've begun to believe it.

"I'm dying to see you, dear. I know you must be terribly lonely without me to cheer you up and make things lively. My cold is not much better—it seems to be on my chest, I can't get rid of it. The doctor—an awfully handsome chap with a cute little mustache—says I'm too interesting to die, so I hope I won't, at least not until I can go back to old New York and astonish them with my voice.

"Good-bye, dearest. Lots of kisses from

"Your ever affectionate friend,

"VIVIE."

The letter revived Virginia's drooping spirits. It pierced the gloom like a gleaming shaft of sunshine, dispelling her melancholy and restoring her gaiety. It also set her thinking. Would she ever see her hero again? Was it true that she was in love? Why did the days seem longer, the sun less bright, her art work less interesting than formerly? She tried to forget those glorious days on the sun-kissed slopes of Mentone, and to concentrate her attention on her painting, but when she sat before her canvas and attempted to sketch in the personages that were to appear in her composition, she could draw only one face—the face with the grave, melancholy expression, which had haunted her since the day she first saw it at Chamounix.

One afternoon, about a month after her return, she

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was walking on the Avenue de Villiers, returning home from the studio, when she heard a quick step overtaking her. A man's voice exclaimed in exotic English:

"How quick you run, Signorina? You will not see old friends now, you are so proud."

Turning quickly she saw Signor Bentoni, with his Vandyck beard and crafty, Mephistophelian smile. She would willingly have avoided him, for she had taken a strong dislike to the man ever since that afternoon in their apartment when, in self-protection, she had to teach him a lesson. He had called at the Rue Galvani on several occasions since, but Virginia was never at home—to him. Fully aware now of the man's real character, she resolved to have nothing more to do with him, and yet she wished to avoid an open rupture, for he had influential friends among the Salon jury, and she was anxious not to imperil her chances.

"Really, I did not see you, Signor," she said with a feeble attempt to appear amiable. "I am in a terrible hurry."

"Ah, you are always in a hurry. I call several times at your apartment—always out—always out."

"I have been away," she stammered, glad to seize on any excuse.

"I will walk with you a little way—you do not object—no?" he pleaded with a compelling smile.

She was strongly tempted to object very vigorously and turn on her heel, but she did not dare, and notic-

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ing her hesitation he took it as a favorable sign and hastened to follow up his advantage. Walking closely at her side, he attracted general attention, and provoked the covert smiles of everyone they met by his extravagant gestures and the ardent, admiring manner in which he turned and looked into her face.

Exceedingly embarrassed and annoyed, Virginia looked around helplessly for some way of escape. Desperate, and with the idea of preventing the conversation taking too personal a turn, she told him about the places she had seen, about Vivie singing in Brussels, and about everything else she could think of except herself. Presently they came to the crossing at the Place Malesherbes, where the confusion of traffic, cabs and omnibuses, coming from all directions, was bewildering. The road was muddy from recent rains, and Virginia halted timidly at the curbstone. This was an opportunity of which Signor Bentoni was not slow to avail himself. Taking Virginia's arm familiarly in his, he said:

"Come, do not fear. With me you are safe. I would not let you come to harm."

Almost before she knew it she was standing, clinging nervously to his arm amid a whirling vortex of swift-moving vehicles of every description—ponderous three-horse omnibuses, recklessly driven fiacres and fast automobiles, which dashed by regardless of everything and everybody. A man's silk hat, blown off by a sudden gust of wind, rolled under the wheel of a cab, which flattened it like a pancake. The look

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of utter dismay on the face of its owner, a smartly dressed youth, was so pathetically comic that Virginia could not restrain her laughter, in which Signor Bentoni joined. The misfortunes of headgear are always productive of mirth. Nobody can explain why, but the fact remains. Virginia and her escort were still laughing at the ludicrous incident when a sudden shout behind caused them to jump quickly aside, out of the way of a cab driven at full speed. As the fiacre sped past, the wheels almost brushing her skirts, Virginia caught a glimpse of its occupant. It was Mr. Stanton. At the same instant he saw her. He smiled and made a movement as if about to halt the coachman. Then, noticing Signor Bentoni and the apparently intimate manner in which she clung to his arm, he merely raised his hat and bowed stiffly. Before Virginia had recovered from her surprise the carriage was out of sight.

He in Paris and she not know it! For a moment her heart seemed to stop still. Yet, on reflection, how could she know it? He had not told her the exact date of his arrival; it was not even sure that he would come at all. Half in jest, she had volunteered to take him to the Louvre, Versailles, Notre Dame and other places of historic interest, and she had given him her address. If he were in Paris and had not come to see her, it meant either that he had forgotten the address or else wished to discontinue the acquaintance. He had certainly recognized her, and if he had merely mislaid the address would he not have stopped the carriage? Then she remembered how she had stood

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there laughing and leaning on the arm of this obnoxious Italian, and her face flushed from chagrin as she realized what a false position circumstances had placed her in. It angered her against the artist all the more. They had now reached the opposite pavement, and quickly withdrawing her arm she turned round and said:

"I must say good-bye now, Signor." Pointing to the left, she added: "I go this way."

The artist was plainly taken by surprise, but his brazen impudence made him equal to the emergency.

"Ah, you go zat way? How fortunate! I go zat way also."

Virginia did not stir. Frigidly she said:

"You must excuse me, Signor. I must leave you here. I have a call to make."

The artist understood that he was dismissed, yet still he was not discouraged. Drawing closer, and staring fixedly at her, as if trying to hypnotize her, he laid one hand on her arm. She immediately drew back.

"Ah, why you so cold—so cruel?" he exclaimed. "Have I not been patient all zese months? How much more must I wait?"

Distressed and alarmed, Virginia began to walk hastily away, but he followed, and walking at her side continued feverishly:

"I love you since zat first day I see you in New York. I vas always your devoted slave—always!" Ecstatically he went on: "Zose eyes of yours—zey is

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full of love! Zat mouth—it is made to be kissed! You are adorable! Tell me—are you free this evening? Ve vill dine together at the Café de Paris. *Voulez-vous, Signorina?*”

This was intolerable impertinence. For a moment Virginia regretted that she were not a man, that she might reply in suitable fashion. Stopping short, almost speechless from indignation, her eyes flashing, the American girl turned on the foreigner:

“How dare you address me in this manner?” she exclaimed hotly. “Are you so little of a gentleman as not to know that your every word is an insult? What have I said or done that should encourage you to take such an unwarrantable liberty?”

He started to protest, but she interrupted him.

“Don’t make excuses. We might as well understand one another, Signor Bentoni. I have seen through your attentions for a long time. You have made a mistake. You are wasting your time. Good afternoon!”

She walked away, leaving the Signor standing in the middle of the pavement, dazed by the vehemence of her indignant outburst.

“Sapristi!” he muttered to himself as he watched her retreating figure, “zose Yankee girls, zey is ze very *diable!*”

By the time Virginia reached the Rue Galvani her anger had all evaporated, and she was inclined rather to laugh than to cry over the incident. The man had displayed his true colors at last, and now she was

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rid of him forever. If her picture was admitted to the Salon in spite of his enmity, she could take all the more credit to herself.

She sat down to write some letters. Ever since her return she had had no thoughts for anything, and all her correspondence was sadly in arrears. After a long communication to Vivie, in which she related in a humorous vein her adventure of that afternoon, she began a long letter home. To her sister she wrote:

"You ask when I'm going back to America. It all depends on the picture which I'm going to send to the Salon, and on which I'm now working. I expect to have it finished by January. If it is accepted I shall be the happiest of girls, as you may imagine. I shall have accomplished what I was ambitious to accomplish, and I shall be ready to return next spring. So tell Curley, Pip and Toto to have a little more patience. Auntie will soon be home.

"Poor Vivie is still struggling bravely along, singing divinely, but wretchedly paid and unable to get engagements save for opera houses of lesser importance. Now she is in Brussels, singing prima donna rôles at the Monnaie, so she is more hopeful. It is a step upward anyway. Paris, Milan and the other big opera houses she has found impossible, and I fear she feels the disappointment more keenly than she admits. Otherwise she is the same dear girl, full of life and animal spirits. But I'm afraid she's overtaxing her strength. She has been very ill. I think you ought to tell Mr. Bryce to make her return home.

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"I have a great secret to confide to you. I have met a most fascinating man, in a most romantic fashion. He saved my life in Switzerland. To you, my dear sister, I confess that I'm very much in love. His name is Stanton, and he is a New Yorker. But there is no danger, dear. Your little sister will remain an old maid to the end of her days."

The next morning Virginia was still in bed when Mme. Garache rang the bell of the apartment and handed the *bonne* a letter addressed "Miss Virginia Norman" in a bold masculine hand. Her woman's instinct told Virginia who it was from. Eagerly tearing the envelope open, she read as follows:

"GRAND HOTEL.

"*Dear Miss Norman:*

"I've just arrived in Paris. I caught sight of you this afternoon on the Place Malesherbes, and was glad to see you looking so well and *happy*. If agreeable, I will call to-morrow afternoon about 3 o'clock.

"Yours faithfully,

"ROBERT STANTON."

He came shortly after three. Virginia was waiting for him, dressed in a pretty white chiffon gown. She greeted him with a frank smile, concealing with a careless air of indifference the emotion that thrilled her at the first sound of his voice. He was serious, pale and silent as usual.

"It's very inviting here," he said, glancing around at the esthetic furnishings of the apartment.

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"Yes," she replied, "it's comfortable and quite large enough. My chum is away most of the time. She's in Brussels now."

"I suppose you were glad to get back to work."

"Of course; the time's getting short now."

"How is your picture getting on? I should like to see it."

She leaned forward eagerly, pleased at the interest he took in it.

"Would you really?" she exclaimed. "I shall be delighted to show it to you. How long do you expect to stay in Paris?"

She strove to appear indifferent to what the reply might be, although her pulse throbbed faster while she awaited the answer. It might have been fancy, but it seemed to her that he looked at her more closely as he replied:

"It all depends. If there's nothing to keep me I may go to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" she echoed almost inaudibly.

"Unless——" he hesitated.

"What?" she demanded.

"Unless I can persuade you to fulfill your promise." With a covert smile he added: "Paris is a dull place when one's alone."

"My promise?" she repeated. "What promise?"

"Didn't you offer to show me the Louvre, Notre Dame and other places?"

Her face brightened.

"I shall be delighted, of course. It is the least I can do for the service you rendered me."

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"But you are probably too busy?" he objected.

"Oh, no. I can make time."

"You have other friends—that gentleman with whom I saw you yesterday. You seemed in good company."

Virginia broke into a peal of laughter.

"If you had only heard me get rid of him a few minutes after you passed us!"

Briefly she told him about the artist. How he had persistently annoyed her with his attentions, and how finally, in self-defence, she had been compelled to adopt corrective measures.

"I shall have to behave myself," he smiled, "or you may be equally harsh with me."

She made no reply, and an embarrassing silence followed. At last he said:

"Well, when shall we make our first excursion? To-morrow?"

"If you like," she answered simply.

CHAPTER VI

PARIS was by no means a strange city to Robert Forrester. He had lived in the Latin Quarter for a couple of years shortly after he was expelled from Columbia, when his benefactor, still hoping to see him redeem himself, imagined that a brief residence in the French capital would give him cosmopolitan experience and put a finishing touch, so to speak, to his college education. The young man's sojourn on the banks of the Seine did, indeed, impart a finishing touch, but not in the sense intended by the merchant. All the vices and follies which the young rake had overlooked during his spectacular progress along Broadway he quickly acquired from the turbulent students of the Boul' Mich'. Contenting himself with merely entering his name at the Law School, he proceeded to amuse himself in the orthodox fashion. Scoffing at any suggestion of serious study, soon after his arrival he became a leader among the wildest of those foolish young men who having gone to the University, the hope and pride of their respective families, to lay a solid foundation for an honored and successful career, waste precious hours in ridiculous pranks, spend their days drinking absinthe and playing cards in the cafés, making nights hideous with their howls, ruining mind and body in dissipations of all kinds.

He realized the folly of it now as he sat on the

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terrasse of the Café Vachette and looked around him. Fifteen years had rolled by since he had last sat at that corner and watched the careless crowd go by. How different it all appeared to-day! The people all about him were strangers. The *Quartier* itself seemed different. He was scarcely able to recognize it as the same spot. The old landmarks were there—the Sorbonne, the Pantheon, the gilded railings of the Luxembourg—but the old-time gaiety was lacking. The cafés and brasseries looked shabby, the students grotesque, the women ugly. The dainty little *ouvrières* with whom he had flirted were now coarse and fat. Disappointed, disillusionized, he thought Paris had lost its charm, not realizing that the change was within himself.

The next morning he met Virginia at the Gare St. Lazare, where they took the train for Versailles. After a short walk from the railroad station through the ugly, straggling town which has grown up around the historic château, they entered the great courtyard of the Palace, once the animated scene of all the pomp and circumstance incidental to the daily activities of a brilliant court, richly colored with gorgeous costumes, busy with the arrival and departure of magnificently caparisoned equipages, the galloping of royal messengers, the tramp of soldiers, the going and coming of courtiers—now silent, abandoned, grass growing between the cobble stones, a chill in the air as in a dwelling of the dead.

Virginia was at once impressed by the tragic lone-

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liness and utter desolation of this marvelously beautiful abode of kings, not so long ago the centre of the civilized world, the fountain head of European culture, wit and fashion, the residence of the most brilliant and powerful monarchs who ever reigned. The sensation she had was of a vast empty house from which all life and laughter had fled. The wheels of a solitary rickety *fiacre*, rattling over the rough pavement, resounded hollow in the manner peculiar to abandoned places, and the white marble statues looked down upon them mournfully from their pedestals.

The few uniformed attendants moved silently and sadly about. The apartments were deserted, no living thing was to be seen in the beautiful gardens. Silence, nothing but silence. Even the birds and insects were subdued. A solemn hush hung over the whole place. A feeling of awe came over them both, and instinctively they spoke in whispers, as if in a church.

As they went through the empty galleries, their footsteps echoing from the highly polished floors, she clung apprehensively to her companion's arm, as if fearful that there might suddenly appear from dark corners shadowy apparitions of the aristocratic dames and gallant courtiers who in past centuries had filled these gilded rooms with gorgeous costumes and chivalrous etiquette. Forrester laughingly reassured her. There was nothing to fear, nothing but silence and neglected magnificence gradually falling into decay. It was as though, having nothing in common with a democratic age, the old château were peacefully slum-

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bering until the day when its rightful masters, restored to the throne of France, should come to revive its pristine brilliance and magnificence.

From the royal suite they passed out on the terrace, where they had a glorious view of the ornamental gardens and park stretching away amid a mass of rich foliage as far as the petit Trianon.

"How beautiful life seems when one looks upon such a picture as this!" murmured Virginia, lost in ecstatic admiration of all she saw.

"I wish that I could enjoy things as you do," exclaimed Robert.

There was a tinge of bitterness in his tone, and she fancied she heard him sigh.

"Why don't you?" she replied quickly. "It's the only way to be happy."

"I suppose you're right. I guess that's the trouble with me. I don't walk on the sunny side of the street."

"Precisely," she answered gravely. "You don't let your nature expand. You are too self-centred, too self-conscious. You weigh every word for fear you may say too much, you watch your every action for fear of a false step. How can one be happy under those conditions. You are too much alone. You need companionship."

He looked down at her, a faint smile hovering about his mouth.

"You're right—always right. What gift is that which enables you to diagnose the malady so unerringly?" Significantly he added: "Yes—I am too

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much alone. I never realized it before so much as now."

She flushed, and felt angry with herself for having talked so freely. He would think her immodest. Then something he said made her laugh merrily, and soon they were on a footing of the most delightful and unrestrained *camaraderie*.

They had luncheon in the open air under the trees, at a picturesque little restaurant near the Palace, and they laughed and chatted like two school children on a holiday. The discreet waiter quite naturally took them for a newly-married couple on their honeymoon, and grinned sympathetically as he took their orders.

"Madame will take a demi-tasse?" he said encouragingly.

Virginia blushed furiously.

"No," corrected Robert, with a smile he tried hard to repress. Madame won't, but Mademoiselle will."

Two weeks went quickly by, and nothing was said about leaving Paris. Forrester seemed, on the contrary, quite willing for his part to have these personally conducted excursions continue indefinitely. To Virginia they were assuredly the happiest hours she had ever known. There was not a day which they did not spend in each other's company. They went to the Louvre and roamed through the gloomy picture galleries enriched with the priceless treasures of the world's art. They drove to the Invalides, and, side by side, contemplated in respectful silence the splendid monument which a nation has erected to Napoleon's glory.

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"Where shall our next pilgrimage be?" asked Virginia.

"Suppose we visit Notre Dame?" he replied. Displaying more than his usual interest, he added: "There's a superb bird's-eye view of the city to be had from the towers."

"I thought you never showed enthusiasm?" said Virginia mockingly. Conscious of her power, she loved to tease him.

He smiled.

"Excuse me. I forgot myself. You see you have communicated to me some of your own impulsive temperament."

Each day the conviction grew stronger upon Virginia that this strange, silent man loved her. Everything told her so—the tone of his voice, the look in his eyes, but above all her own heart. The knowledge of it filled her at the same time with an exquisite thrill and apprehension. What would she say, what should she say if he asked her to marry him? She certainly liked him better than any man she had yet met. His exclusiveness of bearing and distinction of manner forcibly impressed her, and each day she saw in him new qualities to admire. The day seemed brighter when he appeared and the old sense of loneliness came over her when he went. Was this love? She questioned her heart, and it answered in the affirmative.

Robert himself viewed their relations in an entirely different light. Delightful as he found their growing intimacy, it was with him far from being a matter of

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mere sentiment. He recognized that this woman had come into his life at a critical moment, as though sent by some invisible power to save him from himself, to drag him back from the brink just as he was about to take another and final plunge into the murky waters of moral obliquity. At the time he met her at Chamounix he was completely discouraged at the futility of his efforts to take up new interests. He found that a man cannot change his tastes and manner of living as easily as he can his name, and once more he had yearned for the pleasures he had left 3,000 miles behind. Despairing of any real regeneration, hopeless of ever possessing enough moral strength to resist the call of the blood, he was about to give up the fight and return to the reckless course of living from which he had honestly tried to break away forever. Of what use had been his attempts to reform? In America he was still suspected of a terrible crime, his name was universally detested, his own friends shunned him, shrank from him as from a leper. He came to Europe, practically a fugitive, wandering from place to place, avoiding his countrymen, fearing recognition, masquerading under an assumed name, as if really a criminal in fear of arrest. At last, unable to stand it any longer, he had fled to Monte Carlo and plunged once more into the maelstrom. Only at the gaming table was he able to satisfy that for which his nature craved. The nervous tension of high play, the quick catching of the breath preceding the turning of a card or the calling of a number, which meant a

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fortune won or a fortune lost—this was the very essence of life to him. Then appeared this woman, with her frank way of putting things. She was right, of course. He never quite realized how low he had allowed his manhood to sink until he listened to her, and gradually she became for him the priestess of a new life—a life of regeneration and peace. For the first time he understood the meaning of the word “love.”

“Well—where shall we go?” she repeated after a long silence.

“To Notre Dame, if you like,” he replied.

CHAPTER VII

NOTRE DAME! The majestic cathedral, awe inspiring, grandiose. A monstrous pile of blackened stones, fantastic gargoyles and gloomy arches. A marvel of architectural beauty, imperishable monument to the power of the Church and the genius of Man, its grim façade and two square towers dominating the city, a conspicuous landmark for miles. Notre Dame! The soul of Paris, indissolubly associated with her destiny, from Charlemagne to the end, shaken by the same convulsions, scarred with similar wounds, participating alike in its bloody massacres and its brilliant pageants, the crowning place of its emperors, the hot-bed of popery and the nameless crimes of priests and kings, its lofty naves reverberating with the prayers and lamentations of men and women long since returned to dust.

They entered the place from the Pont au Change and an involuntary cry of admiration burst from Virginia as the turn of a corner brought them face to face with the venerable cathedral.

"Isn't it superb?" she exclaimed with enthusiasm. "Just think what stirring scenes those towers have looked down upon through the centuries. If its stones could only speak, what a story they could tell!"

"A story of lust, hate and intrigue," rejoined Robert cynically. "These mighty cathedrals, now mere

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crumbling relics of a power forever shattered, were the bulwarks of the Roman Church, the strongholds of its priests and policies all over the world. To-day what we admire most is the wondrous human skill that could build them. Their spiritual significance grows less with each decade. As the world emerges from savagery and superstition and men advance upwards towards the light, they seek religion in their hearts, not in churches."

Virginia looked up at her companion in surprise.

"Do you know," she said, "this is the first time I've heard you express an opinion about anything."

"Say at once that you didn't believe I had any opinions to express!" he laughed.

Virginia was anxious to see the view before the sun got too low, so they decided to ascend the tower first. They entered through the little black door at the side of the great church and passing the old pensioner in charge, they began the long climb of the interminable stone steps which lead to the summit of the tower. The stairs were narrow and winding and only one person could go up at a time, so Robert went first, leading the way and holding Virginia by one hand for fear she might get dizzy and fall. The low stone steps had been worn hollow in the course of time by countless feet—the sandals of the cowled priest, the fantastic pointed shoes of the Middle Ages, the dainty *soulier* of the sixteenth century courtier, down to the clumsy thick-soled walking boot of the Cook tourist. The climb was fatiguing and every now and

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then they stopped to take breath, sitting in the deep recesses with narrow openings which, at regular intervals, admitted light and air to the stairs. They passed sinister looking archways, with iron gates locked with rusty bolts and chains. Virginia shuddered as her mind conjured up grewsome pictures of bones of forgotten prisoners bleaching in these tower dungeons. Up and up they went, apparently no nearer the top than when they started, the stairs winding round and round with endless monotony. Presently it grew lighter ahead and they hurried on, thinking they had reached the top, but it was only another recessed window. That passed, it became dark again and the stairs went on, up and up.

"Is it very much further?" asked Virginia almost exhausted.

"We'll soon be there now," said Robert encouragingly, while he took a firmer hold of her arm. "Just ahead is the aerial chamber where the big ball is swung, and after that there is only a short flight of stairs to the roof of the tower."

Through the aerial chamber and up more stairs, darker and more difficult than the first. Suddenly there was a burst of light, blinding and almost painful after the long obscurity, and they emerged into the open, bathed in a flood of sunshine.

"Oh, how superb!"

The exclamation came from Virginia. Her companion, more self contained, took in the glorious view in silence. Well were they repaid for their toilsome climb.

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They were on the leads of the roof of the north tower of Notre Dame, the very apex of the huge cathedral. All Paris lay at their feet glittering, resplendent like some beautiful toy. In a glorious panorama, rich in color, instinct with life, stretching away to the horizon they beheld the salient features of the world's most beautiful city—the noble boulevards lined with trees, the splendid Column of July with its gilded fleet-footed Mercury, the Palace of the Louvre and the stately Trocadero, skirting the Seine which traversed the town like an undulating silver ribbon, the broad Champs Elysées, dominated by its classic Triumphal Arch, and away in the distance the green stretches of the Bois de Boulogne.

Neither spoke, both absorbed in the wonderful spectacle before them. Virginia was too pre-occupied to talk. Sensitive to her surroundings as are most people of artistic temperament, the church had made a profound impression upon her. The solemn stillness of the vast, gloomy edifice set down here in the very midst of the noisy, careless city, filled her with astonishment and awe. In the dark corners, under the gloomy archways, she fancied she could see the faces and hear the muffled voices of men long dead. The fantastic sculpturings, the grinning demons with pointed chins resting on claw-like hands, the gutter spouts in the strange form of dogs with out-stretched necks and unfamiliar monsters with gaping jaws, frightened her. What relief to get away from those dark, damp stairs, those silent, mysterious corridors

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with their sinister memories, and breathe once more the fresh air of the gay, bustling world without!

They were at a terrific height. The noises of the city sounded far away in the distance. People walking in the streets looked like flies. Virginia leaned over and quickly recoiled. The height frightened her. From where they stood, it was a sheer drop of 1000 feet. Amused at her nervousness, Forrester stepped out on the very edge of the roof. The slightest misstep, almost a puff of wind would have dashed him headlong to the street.

"Oh, don't—please don't!" pleaded Virginia. "You might fall! It makes me nervous to see you!"

"What would it matter?" he laughed carelessly. "It's a beautiful way of dying, they say. People who have fallen from great heights and lived afterwards describe their sensations as exquisite."

"I'm not ready to die," she replied. He made no response, and after a pause she asked: "Are you?"

He had come down from the edge and stood quietly by her side, gazing out at the marvelous picture unfolded before their eyes.

"Are you?" she repeated, looking up into his face.

"I guess so," he answered. Slowly he added: "There's only one thing that would make me want to cling to life."

"What's that?" she asked, her pulse throbbing as she anticipated what he was going to say.

Her face was turned away from him, but instinctively she felt that he was drawing closer and that his eyes were seeking hers as he answered:

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"Something I have never had. Can you guess what that is?"

The blood rushed to her face, then suddenly receding left her paler than before. She shook her head and he went on, his voice slightly trembling:

"Miss Norman, you can't understand what these walks have meant to me. I did not believe myself capable of taking so much interest in anything on earth. People think me cynical, reckless, egotistical, wholly given up to pleasure. Maybe they're right. One isn't always able to control his temperament, is he?"

"No—not unless he is very determined to conquer it," stammered Virginia, hardly knowing what to say.

He watched her face closely for a moment as if trying to read what was in her heart, and then he said:

"It isn't easy when there's no one to help him—when there's no one who cares."

Virginia made a move towards the little door leading to the stairs.

"It's getting late," she murmured confusedly, "hadn't we better be going?"

He laid a restraining hand on her arm.

"Don't go—not yet! It's so quiet and peaceful up here—so far from the crowd. Besides, I've something to say to you. When I met you I was the loneliest man on God's earth. Those who blamed me for the life I had led did not know that I sought the excitement of gambling as an antidote against fearful mental suffering."

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Virginia listened sympathetically. She had guessed rightly then. This man was unhappy. Her heart went out to him, as he continued :

“All my life I have been subject to spells of depression which have rendered me hardly responsible for my actions. People think I am vicious, unreasonable. It is only my nervous condition. I welcomed anything that would give me temporary respite, and I found distraction in the excitement of high play. When not gambling, these fits of depression returned with redoubled violence. I became afraid of myself. I felt it growing on me and I knew it was only a question of time when it would conquer me and one day prompt me to commit suicide. At times I have believed self-destruction the only way out. Then I met you. We became well acquainted. I at once felt better in your company. My nervousness and depression seemed to disappear at the sound of your voice. As I listened to you and watched you, I realized that the past had all been a mistake, that I had been seeking happiness along the wrong road. I looked into your eyes, and saw that my happiness was there. You held out the promise of a new life. Each day as I knew you better, the gloom receded farther, the skies became brighter. Then I knew that I loved you.”

She remained motionless, her face slightly averted. His head bent down until his cheek was almost touching hers.

“Virginia! I love you! I’ve loved you ever since

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those sunny days at Mentone when you first lighted the flame that will burn in my heart as long as life itself. I love you Virginia, I love you. I want you to be my wife."

Her eyes half closed, she listened as in a dream to his ardent words. He had taken her hand, which now lay passively in his, and he bent tenderly over her, his voice vibrating with passion. She could feel his warm breath upon her cheek as slowly he took courage and drew closer, and through her whole body ran a delicious thrill, the same sensation of languor she had felt that afternoon as she sat watching the sea on the sunlit slopes of Mentone. Ah! why should she go through life alone, when her soul yearned for love and companionship? Why not admit at once to this man, who asked her to be his wife, that she did care for him?

Still clasping her hand he gently drew her to him.

"Virginia," he said gravely, "I am a man of few words. If I've made a mistake let me know frankly. No harm will be done. We will part good friends."

Her face was still averted, and he leaned eagerly forward to catch the reply that came from her lips:

"Yes."

With a wild cry, he clasped her fiercely to his breast. Then, as if not yet sure of his prize, he demanded hoarsely:

"Yes—what?"

"I do love you," she answered almost inaudibly.

She looked timidly up at him, and he took her again

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in his strong arms and there in the sky, with only the wild daws as witnesses, he pressed his burning lips to hers.

"You'll be my wife?" he murmured.

"Yes."

"You'll take me as I am, no matter what ill the world may say of me?"

"Yes—yes."

Again his arms closed about her and their lips met in a long, passionate kiss. A feeling of faintness suddenly came over her and for a moment she lay still, abandoning herself to his embrace.

"What's the matter, dear?" he asked, noticing her sudden pallor.

"Nothing. I'm so happy—that's all," she answered.

They stood side by side, each silent, gazing out over the vast busy city, thinking of the joy that had come into their lives. All at once Robert drew away.

"But you don't yet know all!" he exclaimed abruptly.

His face had grown pale and grave. Instinctively Virginia guessed that something threatened her new found happiness.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He looked at her for a moment, as if wondering within himself how much he might tell her. Then hoarsely he said:

"I am a stranger to you. You know nothing of me. To spare ourselves misery later the truth must be told now, no matter at what cost. I cannot begin with

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a lie. I've always played a square game. I'm not going to cheat now."

"I don't understand," she faltered.

"Stanton is not my real name!"

Virginia fell back. She felt herself grow hot and cold by turns.

"Not your real name?" she stammered. "What is your name?"

He paced up and down the roof, his face white and set, his hands twitching nervously, not knowing how to tell her. Finally, he stopped short and confronting her, he blurted out:

"I ought to have told you long ago. It would have been more honest, but I hadn't the courage. I knew you would shrink from me. I feared I might lose you."

He stopped for a minute and passed his hand over his face, as if to conceal his emotion, while Virginia stood motionless, almost paralyzed, striving to conceal the alarm that each instant grew stronger. He went on:

"My birth is a mystery. I have never been able to discover who my parents were. I was abandoned when an infant on the doorstep of a prominent New York merchant. Out of the goodness of his heart he adopted me, showing me every kindness, and the world thought I was his nephew. He gave me a good education and wanted me to succeed him in business. But unhappily, I disappointed his hopes. Instead of showing gratitude and eagerly seizing the golden opportunity, I went to the bad. I became a professional gambler and

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associate of blacklegs. Disgusted with my conduct, my benefactor refused to have anything more to do with me. He turned me out of doors and I went from bad to worse. I lost all I had at the gaming table and, rendered desperate, was thinking of doing away with myself when something terrible happened. My benefactor was murdered, and I was accused of being his murderer."

Virginia had listened horror stricken. Her face became gradually an ashy white, her breathing came faster and deeper, her entire body was shaken with suppressed emotion. Her voice trembling from agitation, she exclaimed:

"Then you are——"

"Robert Forrester."

"Oh!——"

With a low moan she sank down on the stone parapet and covered her face with her two hands. She felt dizzy and sick. The light seemed suddenly to have gone out of the day, a dark veil passed before her eyes. If a thunderbolt had suddenly crashed down from the blue, she could not have been more terrified than at this unexpected revelation. She felt as if suddenly overwhelmed by a catastrophe from which now no human power could save her. Her peace of mind, her self-respect, her future happiness were blasted forever. This man to whom she had given herself—this man who had held her in his arms and pressed his hot ardent kisses on her lips—was a murderer!



"DON'T TOUCH ME! DON'T TOUCH ME!"

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Robert watched her for a moment in silence. A nervous twitching at the corner of his mouth alone showed what his admission had cost him. Approaching her, he tried gently to put his arms around her. Instantly she recoiled from his contact, as from something unclean.

"Don't touch me! Don't touch me!" she cried, rising hastily to her feet.

He drew himself up and folded his arms. She had wounded his pride. Even love will not forgive that. An expression came into his face and a look into his eyes that she had not yet seen there, the look of the hunted stag when the dogs have at last brought it to bay.

"So you, too, believe me guilty?" he said coldly.

"I don't know—I don't know!" she cried wildly.

"I only know I want to go from here."

She staggered forward and almost ran towards the little exit that led to the spiral staircase, seeking to make her escape. But he was too quick for her. Before she could reach it, he had intercepted her and stood there, his face white and determined, barring her way.

"Where are you going?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Home—anywhere—to get away from here. Please let me pass!"

"You will not go until you've listened to me," he replied grimly.

"I don't wish to listen. You will please allow me to pass!" she exclaimed with hauteur.

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She attempted to push her way by him, but it would have been as easy for her to move a rock. Finding her efforts useless she tried diplomacy.

"Please let me go. It's getting late," she pleaded.

"Not until you've heard what I want to say," he replied doggedly.

Virginia began now to feel genuine alarm at her situation. This man was desperate. There was no knowing what he might do.

"Unless you immediately let me pass," she exclaimed indignantly, "I shall call for assistance."

He smiled grimly, as he answered:

"Only the birds will hear you. We are alone on top of this tower, a thousand feet above the street. No one could hear you, no matter how loudly you shout."

Distracted, powerless to resist his will, Virginia leaned helplessly against the wall, trembling in every limb. Drawing nearer to her, he spoke calmly and deliberately:

"For two years I have suffered in silence from a cruel wrong. I have been accused of a fearful crime of which I am innocent as you yourself. I have done nothing to rehabilitate my character because until now I have not cared what opinion the world had of me. But now it is different. You have held out the hope of a new life. You've promised to be my wife—"

"My promise was given under a misunderstanding," interrupted Virginia in great distress. "It is impossible now. Everything must end between us. You ought to be able to see that!"

He tried to grasp her hand, but she drew back.

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"Virginia," he pleaded, "don't drive me to desperation! If you abandon me I'll kill myself—I solemnly swear it. I have looked on you as a gift from heaven. I feel that with your love to sustain and guide me I can wipe out the past, prove my innocence of the charge brought against me, and return to New York completely rehabilitated. The man I suspect of having committed the murder is now in Europe. His name is Creston Trehern. I said nothing to the police of my suspicion because I resented their treatment. I did not care to help them. But now the situation is changed. I wish to clear myself in your eyes. I shall not rest night or day until I have found the man who killed Mr. Forrester. When I have found him and forced him to confess, will you believe me then?"

Virginia made no answer. The nervous strain had been too much for her. Her eyes were red, as if she had been weeping.

"Will you believe me then?" he pleaded earnestly.

"I don't know—I can't say," she cried hysterically. "Please let me go."

Robert stood looking at her, as if undecided what course to adopt, when suddenly an old man in a black skull-cap appeared at the entrance to the stairs. It was the guardian of the tower come to remind them that it was closing up time.

"*On ferme, monsieur, madame! On ferme!*" he squeaked in querulous tones, as if irritated at these inconsiderate lovers who had compelled him to take such a long climb.

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Taking quick advantage of this unlooked for appearance, Virginia brushed hurriedly past the old tower-keeper and in a second had disappeared down the stone stairs.

Robert made no attempt to stop her. Lighting a cigar he took a five franc piece from his pocket and gave it to the old man.

"*Bon soir*," he said, going towards the exit.

"*Bon soir, monsieur, et merci!*" exclaimed the keeper who, amazed at the generous gratuity, bowed low and mumbled his thanks.

Robert listened for a moment at the top of the stairs and then called:

"Virginia!

There was no answer. Only the echo of his own voice resounding through the great empty spaces of the vast cathedral. He continued quickly down the stairs to the street.

CHAPTER VIII

THE great boulevards, with their brilliantly lighted shops, theatres and cafés stretching away under the trees in a long unbroken line as far as the eye could reach, presented their wonted animated picture of cosmopolitan life and gaiety. At the little circular marble-topped tables in front of the cafés sat crowds of well dressed men and women, sipping their after-dinner coffee, chatting and laughing, while hoarse voiced news vendors shouted late editions of the evening papers, and sinister looking fakirs passed up and down, offering their dubious wares. In the roadway struggled a black mass of confused and noisy traffic, ponderous omnibuses and light fiacres, their obstreperous drivers cursing and quarreling as they disputed the right of way.

Ensnconced in a sheltered corner of the Brasserie Poussin, sat Robert Forrester moodily watching the kaleidoscopic scene. In his hand he held a newspaper, which he made no pretence to read. His demi-tasse stood untouched before him. Every evening for the past fortnight he had sat for hours in that same spot, motionless, silent, shrinking from observation, looking up and down the boulevard, anxiously scanning each face in the crowds that swept past the tables, until the waiters and other patrons who got to know him by sight, pointed him out derisively as the mad

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American who seemed to be watching for some woman who never came.

They were nearly right, but not quite. Forrester was indeed watching, not for a woman, but for the man whom he had every reason to suspect could solve the mystery of the old merchant's murder. He had not seen Trehern again since the brief glimpse he got of him the first day of his arrival in Paris, but he argued that if his old associate were still in the city, it was only a question of time when he must appear on the boulevards. If he watched long enough his patience would be rewarded.

Two weeks had slipped by since that afternoon's visit to Notre Dame—fourteen long days of mental torture that, to Forrester, seemed as many years. When he reached the street after the long descent and saw Virginia nowhere in sight, when he realized that she had fled from him as one flees from something monstrous and terrifying, cold sweat burst from every pore, his heart seemed to stand still. He was overwhelmed by a sickening sense of utter abandonment, as if the last, the only hope that remained in life, had suddenly gone from him. He had lost the prize just at the moment when it seemed secure within his grasp. The whole fabric of happiness which he had laboriously built up day by day had collapsed like a pack of cards. He had taken one draught of the cup of happiness *only* to have it dashed from his lips forever. Like one demented, he staggered home to his hotel, torn by conflicting emotions, now dejected and despondent,

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now rebellious and furious, cursing the world's injustice. The next day when he was calmer, he affected a stoical indifference, but inwardly he suffered abominably. It was only now that he realized what this woman meant to him. Yet he could not blame Virginia. It was not from him that she had fled but from his name which she had been taught to detest. Nor could he blame himself. The truth had to be told. Better that they should part now and never see each other again than that the truth should be revealed when it was too late, with added suffering and misery for them both.

What did the future hold out to him now? The light had gone out of his life. He had been raised to the heights of delirious joy only to be suddenly thrust back to the slimy depths of abject despair. His hope of regeneration through a pure, spiritual love, his ambitious plans to rehabilitate his name and gain the respect of the world, had been blasted at one stroke. A weaker man would have succumbed under the crushing blow and ended it there and then. But Forrester had still something of the gambler in him. As long as the stake was worth it, he would play the game. He would win back this woman who had come to be a necessary part of his life. He would prove to her that people had lied about him, that the frightful accusation which still hung over his head was false. If it took every cent he had in the world, if it cost him his life, he would find the man who murdered old John Forrester. Until now he had been apathetic.

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Smarting under the injustice of a baseless accusation he had let the police work unaided. But now there was a prize to be won, and he would not rest until the murderer was convicted and his own name cleared. Convinced that Trehern was the man, he was determined to confront him wherever he found him, have him arrested, if necessary, on some trifling complaint and thus hold him until extradition papers on the graver charge could arrive from New York.

He had written to Virginia the day following their visit to Notre Dame, but received no answer. Determined at all hazards to see her and convince her of his sincerity he went to the Rue Galvani, only to find the apartment empty. Mme. Garache, the hirsute janitress, said that Mlle. Norman had received bad news from her friend, the singer, and had left at once for Brussels. He wrote to Brussels, and in a few days came the reply:

“BRUSSELS, Jan. 16, 19—.

“*Dear Mr. Forrester:*

“I left Paris on receipt of a telegram from my poor friend, Vivie Bryce, who is dangerously ill with pneumonia. I am constantly at her bedside, and I have no idea when I shall be able to return to Paris. If I do come back, it will probably be only to return to America.

“You reproach me with having trifled with you. God knows the accusation is unjust. If you have suffered, what do you think my pain has been? Yes, I believe that you love me and that you are sincere

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in your determination to rehabilitate yourself. God grant that you may be successful. I believe you are innocent. I may even confess that I love you, with all my heart and soul, but what is the use? With such a fearful charge still hanging over your head, our union would be impossible. The court acquitted you, but the world believes you guilty, and until the terrible mystery is cleared up there must always be a bridgeless gulf between us. Meantime, try to forget me. It is better for us both. You go your way, and I will go mine. Do not waver in your resolution, conquer yourself. The poet says 'to build up a future, Heaven shatters the past.' Let your past be shattered forever, and continue on upward to a new, higher life. Achieve things, make for yourself an honored career, so I may hear of you and be proud of you. Adieu!

"VIRGINIA."

Far from being discouraged at this letter, Robert eagerly grasped at the hope it held out as a drowning man grasps at a drifting straw. She admitted that she loved him. Was not that sufficient? It was now for him to clear his name and show himself guiltless before the world. Henceforth, the half promise the letter contained would be as a beacon blazing in his life, spurring him on with unwearying energy and relentless purpose until he had succeeded in finding the murderer and handed him over to justice.

That is why he was sitting there watching, waiting as he had done every night for the past fortnight.

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Sooner or later the man he suspected would come along. The rest he thought would be easy. Personal courage Robert Forrester had never lacked. He knew his man. Trehern would not attempt any violence. If he did, he was more than a match for him.

He watched the gay Parisian throng as it surged up and down the brilliantly lighted thoroughfare. Everybody was in high spirits, no one was in a hurry. There were saucy modistes, hatless, merry, flirting with perfumed old beaux, pretty flower girls offering their sweet smelling wares, heavy booted dragoons resplendent in shining cuirass and helmet, picturesque students with long hair, peg-top trousers and flowing ties, buxom market women, elegantly gowned actresses, tall bearded Russians, spectacled Germans, Moroccans in their native turbans, Englishmen in loud check suits, all mingling in picturesque confusion.

Forrester was idly watching the scene, realizing how little he himself participated in the gaiety around him, when suddenly he sat up with a start. Two men with their backs turned towards him were standing at the corner of the next street, conversing in low tones. It was easy to see from their dress that they were Americans. One was a stranger, but the other he knew only too well. It was Creston Trehern.

Forrester felt himself grow pale. His hands trembled violently. Instinctively he half rose from his seat, and in his agitation he upset a glass of water. His weary vigils had at last been rewarded. The quarry he hunted was there, within shooting distance. His first impulse was to dash out and seize Trehern,

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denouncing him as an assassin and calling the bystanders to his assistance, but a moment's reflection convinced him of the imprudence of any such hasty action. Trehern would protest his innocence, perhaps denounce his accuser as a madman, and after all he had no proof. No, the best way was to accost him quietly so as not to arouse his suspicion, and leave the rest to chance.

Presently the stranger went away and Trehern, turning on his heel, sauntered leisurely past the café where Forrester was sitting. It was the same Trehern as of old—well dressed, with a flower in his button-hole, the typical swell crook. Directly he went by, Forrester arose and followed him. In a few rapid steps he overtook him.

"Hello, Trehern! Where are you bound for?"

Recognizing the voice, the man stopped short, as if he had been shot. Turning quickly he exclaimed:

"Bob, by all that's queer! Who on earth would have expected to see you here? I saw that you managed to get out of that scrape in New York, but I'd no idea that you had left America. What are you doing in Paris?"

"I came here on a serious mission," replied Robert slowly and deliberately.

He looked steadily into his old associate's eyes as if trying to detect some sign of guilt, but Trehern met his closest scrutiny without a trace of embarrassment.

"A mission?" echoed Joe Mansfield's ex-tout, puzzled. "What mission?"

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"To look for someone who's wanted badly in New York," answered Forrester still more pointedly.

"Do I know him?" demanded Trehern.

"Perhaps you do," replied Forrester quickly.

"Who is it?"

"The murderer of John Forrester!"

Robert started forward, every nerve tense, ready for any emergency, expecting some violent outbreak from his interlocutor, but none came. If Trehern was the midnight assassin who had got into the merchant's house, shot the old man in cold blood and made away with the bonds, there was nothing in his manner to betray it. Cool and unruffled, he did not even appear to be aware that Robert was talking very directly at him.

Was it merely an impudent bluff? Forrester thought he would put it to a test. Suddenly changing his tactics, he exclaimed bluntly:

"Come, Trehern, what's the good of beating about the bush? The game's up. There's a warrant out for your arrest. You've been shadowed day and night by detectives for the last two days. You'd better own up!

Trehern stood open-mouthed, gazing at his interlocutor in petrified astonishment, as if afraid he was out of his mind.

"What are you driving at?" he exclaimed.

Excitedly laying a hand on his arm, Robert shouted hoarsely:

"You're wanted in New York for the murder of John Forrester!"

"What?" exclaimed Trehern, starting back.

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"Yes," cried Robert. "It's no use denying it. They've got you right. You might as well own up and go back quietly. You'll spare yourself a lot of trouble if you come before the American consul and make a clean breast of it. You knew he kept the bonds in the house, for I told you so—you questioned me again and seemed interested. I remember now. You met Steve Marston at Mansfield's and were seen talking with him, probably plotting the crime. You left the gambling house early and did not come back. Where were you that evening, Creston Trehern? Can you answer?"

Robert was white with suppressed excitement. He expected an outbreak at any moment. His eye watched Trehern's every move. If he attempted to pull a gun, he would spring upon him and pin him to the earth. At that minute, inspired by hope, he felt strong enough to fell a Hercules. But to his amazement Trehern burst out laughing.

"Well, if that don't beat the deck!" he cried. "So that's the wild goose chase you're on, is it? Why, my dear fellow, I don't know any more about that job than you do. When I left America I thought I knew even less. It's guess again, old boy. You're barking up the wrong tree this time. But I don't bear malice. No harm done, I assure you. Come and have a drink, and we'll talk it over."

He led the way to a café. Bewildered, Robert followed him mechanically, as if in a daze.

They sat down at an isolated table and Trehern told

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him all he knew about the case. He admitted frankly that his cupidity had been aroused by the knowledge that a large sum in bonds was in the house. He said he had gone to the house, not to kill, but to get the bonds, and told how, when he entered, he had discovered the body lying in a pool of blood. He had left America immediately afterwards and lived ever since on the Continent, gambling at the different resorts. His manner of living was not perhaps beyond reproach. He had to live as he could, by his wits, but as to the murder of the old merchant he was as innocent as an unborn babe.

"Are you speaking the truth?" demanded Robert sternly.

"As I expect to meet my Maker!" replied the crook with more earnestness than Forrester thought him capable of. "I'll tell you something else," he went on. "You and I didn't part on very friendly terms in New York, but I did you a good turn that night of the murder."

"Did me a good turn! What do you mean?" demanded Forrester.

"Just as I was leaving the room where the dead man lay, I saw a paper on the floor near the safe. I picked it up, thinking it might be of value. It was John Forrester's new will, and the ink on the signature was scarcely dry."

"The new will!" exclaimed Forrester. "What did you do with it?"

"What did I do with it?" echoed Trehern. "It wasn't any good to me, was it? If found, it would do

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a heap of harm to an old pal of mine, so I destroyed it."

Forrester extended his hand.

"You did that for me, Trehern?"

"Yes—just for auld lang syne—to show there was no ill feeling."

"You're a better fellow than I thought you were," said Forrester warmly. "But how did the will get there?"

"Probably dropped on the floor while the murderer, whoever he was, ransacked the safe for the bonds," replied Trehern laconically.

"Who could have done it?" said Forrester helplessly. A sickening sense of failure came over him. He felt he was drifting further than ever away from the solution he so ardently desired.

Trehern scratched his head thoughtfully.

"The man who did that job will be caught when he tries to dispose of the bonds. It's curious that I should run across you now. I was only thinking of this case last night. I saw a paragraph in an old copy of the *New York Herald* that may answer your question. Some of the stolen bonds have been offered for sale."

"How do you know?" demanded Forrester eagerly.

Trehern drew out his pocketbook, and taking from it a newspaper clipping, handed it to his companion. It ran as follows:

AFTERMATH OF THE FORRESTER MURDER.

CHICAGO. Monday.—An incident which occurred here today in a broker's office recalled the Forrester mystery in New York which

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two years ago created a sensation throughout the entire country. An elderly man wearing blue spectacles entered the office of Rawley & Co., stock brokers, of State Street, and offered for sale two \$1000 bonds of the New York Central Railroad. They were numbered respectively A831 and A832. The clerk who waited on him happened to remember that these numbers were in the list of bonds stolen at the time of the Forrester murder. He quickly informed a member of the firm who after questioning the man agreed to purchase the bonds at the market price. In order to gain time so that he could inform the police, the broker asked the man to call again in an hour for the money. The stranger, however, had evidently taken alarm, for the man with the blue spectacles never came back. He was a stranger in Chicago and at his hotel, to which he was traced, they thought he was from New York.

"There!" cried Trehern triumphantly. "Those bonds offered for sale were taken from the safe the night Mr. Forrester was murdered. The man with the blue spectacles is undoubtedly the murderer. Find him and the mystery is solved."

Robert was thunderstruck. Trehern had told a straight story. There was no reason to disbelieve him, and the newspaper clipping indicated an entirely different trail. He had been on the wrong scent all the time. The quarry was nearer home. He rose and held out his hand:

"Good-bye, Trehern?" he said. "You and I have not been very good friends of late. But I owe you an apology. My suspicions were unjust. I owe you thanks for putting me at last on the right track."

"Where are you going?" asked Trehern.

"To America—to find the man with the blue spectacles!"

CHAPTER IX

THE rain came down in solid sheets of water, driven slantwise by a furious gale. The murky skies seemed to have opened wide their sluice gates as if offended Heaven were determined to drown the corrupt and arrogant city. Lower Broadway, well nigh unfordable, presented the appearance of a muddy torrent, the gutters, choked and overflowing, proving inadequate to carry off the tremendous downpour. At the corners of the narrow canyon-like side streets, the sou'easter attained the velocity of a cyclone. The few pedestrians who attempted to brave the storm met with instant disaster. Umbrellas were immediately put out of commission and their owners forced to run frantically for shelter, regardless of dignity. The financial district, the heart of the city's life and energy, the throbbing pulse of the nation's industry, was completely deserted. On the sidewalks, usually surging with a mob of hurrying brokers and messengers, not so much as a cat was to be seen. Broad Street was a howling wilderness. Even the curb brokers, well seasoned to all sorts of weather, had to seek cover before the fury of the tempest.

Two o'clock struck from the tower of old Trinity, the rich deep-toned notes reverberating clear and high above the peaceful churchyard. Another hour and the

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Stock Exchange would close, completing the business day.

In the doorway of an adjacent skyscraper a tall, elderly man had taken refuge. His face was drawn and anxious looking, his coat was shabby, his linen soiled and his shoes down at the heels. His torn umbrella had protected him badly from the rain, for he was wet through. He appeared to be suffering from some ailment of the eyes for he wore colored spectacles, and his rather dilapidated silk hat was circled by a mourning band. Every now and then he leaned out and looked up at the lowering moisture laden clouds, as if impatient to proceed on his way.

Few who had known Richard Bryce in the hey-day of his prosperity would have recognized in this threadbare, shrinking, pathetic derelict of a man the one time successful lawyer. Yet Bryce it was, worn to a shadow, out at elbow, his last dollar gone, utterly ruined by his insensate passion for stock gambling. To-day he was down and out. His dream of millions had failed miserably. Penniless, discredited, shunned by his former associates, eyed with suspicion by strangers, he was one more to be added to Wall Street's countless victims, that insatiable, remorseless thoroughfare which, as someone has aptly said, is watered with tears and paved with wasted gold.

The weeping skies were singularly in harmony with the ex-lawyer's gloomy reflections as he stood idly watching the deluge, reviewing in his mind the disastrous happenings of the past two years. This, then,

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was the outcome of all his scheming to acquire quick wealth! At last he had to admit defeat. All his plans had failed miserably without hope of ever regaining the thousands that had been swept away, and now starvation, actual want, stared him in the face!

While his old friend John Forrester still lived, and Vivie was at home, he had succeeded in concealing the full extent of his operations, but when all restraint was removed he went down to Wall Street with the avowed intention of making himself a millionaire. Like a general who invests an enemy's stronghold, he sat down before the Stock Exchange studying its tactics, trying to master its difficulties, seeking the weak places in its defences. He was successful in his first operations. In one day he netted a profit of \$10,000. He thought it would continue, and he already heard people styling him the Napoleon of finance. He dreamed of organizing gigantic pools, engineering secret manipulations on a huge scale that would depress or raise prices to suit his wishes. He expected to make a million a week. In a year his fortune would rival that of Rockefeller. But something went wrong. His wild-cat schemes did not pan out. Suddenly there was an organized bear drive against a certain stock in which he was involved to the extent of thousands of shares. He made desperate efforts to stem the tide, but it was too strong and swept everything before it. His brokers made peremptory demands for more margins. He sacrificed everything, his home, his furniture, but nothing availed. All he could

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raise was as a drop in the ocean compared with what he needed. Prices went lower and lower until everything was wiped out. In three days \$800,000 were swept away. Still, he could not stop. The gambling fever was in his blood. He must go on in the hope of regaining what he had lost. He borrowed right and left in order to speculate anew, but his ill luck continued. More thousands disappeared, until his credit was exhausted, and he could raise no more. He sold his jewelry, even his clothes, until everything he possessed in the world, what he owned and what he owed went into the gaping maw of the insatiable monster. His money gone, his credit gone, shunned by his acquaintances, hounded by creditors, the man became a derelict. Hollow-eyed, hungry, almost in tatters, he haunted the brokers' offices in Wall Street, furtively entering places where he was not known, to glance at the board, studying the figures, still gambling mentally with money he did not possess, taking mental delivery of shares and profits he would never see. The brokers who noticed the gaunt, hollow-eyed, silent stranger, merely shrugged their shoulders. It was a sight to which they were accustomed. Only another, they muttered.

Trinity's clock struck the half hour. He could not wait any longer. The man from whom he expected to borrow a dollar would soon leave his office, and if he did not succeed in negotiating that loan it meant going to bed again without dinner. So hastily buttoning his frayed overcoat and opening his tattered umbrella, he

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sallied forth, and splashing his way across Broadway, hurried down Wall Street.

As he kept his umbrella before his face in order to get all the protection possible, he did not see another pedestrian hurrying towards him from the opposite direction. A head on collision was inevitable, and as the new comer was considerably the younger and heavier of the two, the lawyer had the worse of the encounter. His umbrella was smashed in, his hat fell into the gutter and the spectacles were knocked off his nose. The younger man stopped to pick up the hat and the spectacles, and after profuse apologies, was about to pass on when he caught a glimpse of the other's face.

"Slivers!" he ejaculated in open-mouthed astonishment, "if it isn't Mr. Bryce!"

Billie Willets, fatter than ever, stood gaping at the lawyer, who appeared no little embarrassed at the meeting. The Chicago youth was still in New York. He had left college almost immediately after his friend Forrester's departure for Europe and declining his father's invitation to return West and go into the sausage business, had taken a position in a broker's office in Broad Street. The excitement of the game, the short hours and apparently little work just suited with Billie's notion of the kind of employment a self-respecting gentleman should have. He expected to make a lucky "strike" himself one of these days, and meantime he was not worrying. He had acquired wisdom with additional years. He had dropped

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entirely the fast crowd that was rapidly leading him to his undoing, and as far as he was capable of having any purpose in life at all, he was trying to be a respectable citizen. He had written several times to Forrester, but the few answers he had received were so vague that at last he got discouraged and ceased writing, never expecting to see his former associate again. He regretted the break in their friendship, for he had always liked Bob Forrester, in spite of his eccentricities. Having made a new circle of acquaintances he never saw anything of the Townsends. He had no idea what Virginia and Vivie were doing abroad, and he had only heard of Lawyer Bryce's misfortunes indirectly.

"I hadn't any idea you were in town, Mr. Bryce," he gasped in his explosive fashion. "I saw in the papers that you had sold your house. They said you had gone out West." Taking mental inventory of the lawyer's shabby clothes, he added: "I was sorry to hear you were caught down here so badly. I hope you got some of it back."

"No," replied Bryce hoarsely, "I lost everything—house—furniture—everything. I went West to try to realize on some property I have, but I was unsuccessful. I'm dead broke. For the last few weeks I've scarcely been able to keep myself alive."

"So bad as that?" exclaimed Billie sympathetically. Putting his hand in his pocket and pulling out a ten dollar bill, he added good naturedly: "Take this—as a loan. It will help some until you get on your feet again. What do you expect to do?"

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The lawyer took the money, mumbling his thanks.

"I'll have money soon—plenty of it," he replied hastily. "I'm trying to realize on some holdings I still have."

"What is it—real estate—stocks?" inquired Billie, thinking it might be business he could secure for his firm.

"Yes," answered Bryce evasively. "Some securities I've held for some time. I've been waiting for a favorable market."

"What securities are they? Let me handle them for you."

"Oh, no," replied the lawyer quickly. "They are already in my broker's hands." Abruptly turning to go, he said: "Good-bye. Glad to have seen you."

His manner was restless and uneasy. He fidgetted about as if anxious to proceed on his way. As Billie extended his hand, he noticed the mourning band on Bryce's hat.

"You are in mourning, I see," he said.

"What—didn't you know?" ejaculated Bryce.

"Know what?"

"Vivie died last month in Brussels!"

Billie was so startled at this terrible and totally unexpected news that he nearly fell over. Vivie Bryce dead! Was it possible? He had long since abandoned hope that the little singer would ever be anything to him, but he had never forgotten her. That her beautiful young life could have had so untimely an end seemed too shocking to be true.

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"Dead! It isn't possible!" he exclaimed in consternation.

The lawyer's eyes filled with tears.

"It's only too true," he murmured, shaking his head sadly. "I received the news last month. A cable from Miss Norman was awaiting my return from the West. The poor child died in Brussels after an operation for appendicitis. It was a dreadful blow as you may imagine. I had been looking forward to her home-coming this summer. It was about the only thing I had left in life to look forward to. Each letter gave more hope that I would see her come back successful. She was getting on splendidly, singing triumphantly in the most important opera houses of Europe. A brilliant engagement for America seemed certain. Then all at once came this awful tragedy. I knew she had been ill, but I had no idea she was in danger."

"Was she buried in Brussels?" inquired Billie in a voice quivering with genuine emotion.

"Yes—it was no use bringing her back. It would have been too painful. She rests in peace over there where her brave little heart struggled and conquered. She won the fight, but it was too late—too late! Miss Norman is now on the ocean returning with her things."

A great lump rose in Billie's throat and choked him. He gripped the lawyer's hand in silence.

Tears were coursing down the lawyer's cheeks. He had loved his sister's child, in his peculiar undemon-

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strative way, as much as his egotistical self-centred nature would allow. For years Vivie had been his only companion; he had come to regard her as the hope of his old age. If her death had occurred at any other time he would have been overwhelmed by his bereavement. But of late fortune had dealt him so many hard knocks that he was scarcely able to fully realize his tremendous loss. It was only when talking of her to old friends who, like Billie, had known her, that he permitted himself to show any feeling. Taking his handkerchief from his pocket he removed his spectacles and wiped his eyes.

The news had quite unnerved Billie. He had never liked the lawyer, but he could not help feeling sincere sympathy for him in all his trouble. Wishing to distract his attention from his affliction, he changed the sad subject.

"Since when have you taken to spectacles?" he inquired.

The lawyer started, as if the question embarrassed him. Quickly he answered:

"I've had trouble with my eyes. The strong light hurts them. The doctor advised me to wear colored glasses."

Billie again held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Mr. Bryce. I can't say how sorry I am. If I can do anything for you, come and see me."

Again stammering his thanks, the lawyer readjusted the glasses, opened his umbrella and again sallied forth in the rain.

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"What a double tragedy!" reflected Billie, as he hurried across Broadway to the elevated train. "Two lives foolishly sacrificed—one in the pursuit of art, the other in the pursuit of money. How much happier her fate than his! She at least died in harness, sacrificing her young life for love of her work, almost succeeding in realizing her ambition, leaving her sweet memory to be cherished by all who loved her, while this poor wretch walks the streets hungry, homeless, with remorse and troubled conscience for sole companions. He wondered why the old man cared to live. Perhaps he lacked the courage to die, or perhaps he contemplated suicide. His manner certainly appeared strange. He remembered how Bob Forrester had always disliked the man, and declared him to be his implacable enemy. If revenge was sweet, Forrester could gloat now over the lawyer's misfortunes.

When he reached the hotel, he found in his room a letter with a foreign postmark. Instantly he recognized the handwriting, although he had not seen a specimen of it for at least six months. It was from Forrester. The letter was very brief, and ran as follows:

PARIS, March 19, 1906.

"Dear Billie:

"I'm coming home on the Touraine. I have serious business on hand. I want you to help me. Meet me at the dock.
BOB."

CHAPTER X

TO Robert Forrester his home-coming seemed like returning from exile. When he stepped ashore from the steamer he gave the faithful Billie a silent hand shake that said more than words, and as they drove from the dock to the hotel and he looked out upon the familiar streets and scenes amid which he had mis-spent the best years of his life the man dropped for a moment his mask of cynical indifference and was stirred inwardly by genuine emotion. This, after all, was the only home he had ever known. His long, weary wanderings in foreign lands had made him only the more eager to return to it.

An American is never so appreciative of his own country as when he sees his native city again after a prolonged stay abroad. The things which, when at home, he had looked upon without seeing—the splendid buildings, handsome shops, beautiful parks, fine thoroughfares, luxurious cafés and seething, bustling cosmopolitan population vibrating with nervous energy—all these characteristics of the metropolis of the western world he notes with surprise and admiration, as if viewing them for the first time. This was the way Robert Forrester was impressed. No foreign city had interested him half as much as New York did now. Everything was new to him. Many improvements had been completed during his absence.

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The big hotels, astonishing skyscrapers, colossal bridges, wonderful subways—all seemed to him to express the industry, progress and genius of a great nation. This was the city he loved. Here he would stay for the rest of his days. He had fled from an intolerable situation, from a fearful accusation. He had come back with a stern purpose, from which nothing should deter him—to vindicate his own name and find the man who killed John Forrester.

An impulse common in everyone who goes back to a place after a long absence is to revisit those places closely associated with the past. It is a natural instinct which the police often depend upon to capture criminals. They have found by experience that the assassin is sure to return sooner or later to the scene of his crime, as if irresistibly attracted thither by the same fatal fascination which draws the moth to the flame. Forrester was not exempt from the same desire. He went to Second Avenue and gazed up at the windows of the old house in which his boyhood days were spent, as if he thought a closer inspection of the premises might suggest some clue which until now had been overlooked.

The house was still closed and the windows boarded up. Apparently no one had lived in it since he sold it. He saw in the neighborhood several people he knew, but not expecting to see him, they did not recognize in the man who stood silently looking at the empty house that Robert Forrester who only a few years ago they had vehemently denounced as the venerable merchant's assassin.

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Nothing subsides so quickly as popular excitement. The news of a sensational murder or a conflagration costing many lives sends a thrill of horror through the land. For a few weeks—sometimes it is only days—the public and press are excited to the point of frenzy. Then other events come up to attract attention, and the crime and the holocaust are forgotten. This was true of the Forrester case. At times some mention of the affair cropped up in the newspapers or it was casually alluded to in conversation, but by the general public it was entirely forgotten, and the police had long ago shelved it among other unsolved mysteries of crime.

Forrester revisited his old haunts in the Tenderloin, partly from curiosity to greet former acquaintances, really to test himself, to see if the former life held any attractions for him. He found Joe Mansfield's luxurious palace closed. The place had succumbed to an unexpected and successful police raid, and Mansfield, thus rudely put out of business, had quit gambling for the more profitable game of politics. In the gay all-night resorts along Broadway, where gilded youth makes the dollars fly, he found the same old crowd of flashy men-about-town, callow boys and half tipsy, yellow-haired women, carousing boisterously. Some of his former associates caught sight of him, and with a yell of recognition invited him to join their hilarious circle. With a cold nod he curtly declined and passed on, secretly gratified to find that these scenes of debauch, these people, now filled him with a sensation

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of disgust. He wondered how that kind of thing had ever appealed to him. As he watched the women, some mere girls barely out of their teens, their hard, vicious faces flushed with wine, beckoning to him with a drunken leer, there arose before his mental vision another face—the sweet, refined face of the one woman in the world. He had not seen or heard from Virginia when he sailed from Havre. The day before he left Paris he had gone again to the Rue Galvani in a desperate hope of meeting her, and the concierge told him that there was bad news from Brussels. Miss Norman's friend had just died. She thought Miss Norman would soon return, but only to sail immediately for America. That was all he could learn about her movements.

The first few weeks after his arrival in New York he spent in consultation with Mr. Farrell, his attorney, studying the facts brought out at the inquest, examining carefully the list of the stolen securities.

Mr. Farrell did not offer much encouragement.

"What's the good of reopening the case?" he argued. "You're now enjoying what was left of the old man's estate. As to the stolen bonds, you'll never get those back. The police have given up the job as hopeless. I don't see why you worry yourself. You don't need the money."

"It's not the money," replied Robert quietly. "I wish to stay in America, and be able to look every man and woman straight in the eye. While the man who killed Mr. Forrester remains at liberty people will continue to think me guilty."

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"What do you care?" retorted Mr. Farrell, shrugging his shoulders.

"I do care," answered Robert earnestly. "What's more, something tells me I shall be successful."

"Well, here's good luck to you," smiled the lawyer sceptically. "When you've got your man, send for me, and we'll clap him in jail."

Left to unravel the mystery by himself, Forrester set to work. The first step was to keep a close watch in all places where it was likely that the securities would be again offered for sale. The fact that two of the bonds had already made their appearance in Chicago showed that the murderer thought the hue and cry was over and was getting bolder. He would probably make further attempts to dispose of them. The second step, therefore, was to get on the trail of an elderly man wearing blue spectacles.

In his rooms at the Waldorf, where Forrester had taken temporary quarters, he and Billie sat for hours, discussing the case, poring over old newspaper clippings, preparing a plan of campaign.

"Now own up, Billie," said Robert in a jocular tone. "Even you condemned me at first."

For a moment the fat youth was taken aback, and as usual when embarrassed he began to stutter.

"To be frank, Bob, things did look pretty bad. But when that day in the Tombs you solemnly swore you knew nothing about it, I believed you. From that moment I've stuck to you. Yet there was still something I couldn't understand. It looked queer. That

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afternoon we played poker you lost every cent you had. You admitted to me that you were completely cleaned out. Yet at midnight you turned up at Mansfield's with a fat roll of yellow backs. Can you wonder I was suspicious?"

Forrester smiled grimly.

"I suppose that did count against me. Yet the money was mine all right. I didn't take the trouble to explain, that's all. I'll tell you now where I got the money, and you're the only one that shall know, because I don't care to talk about it. I got it from Marks."

"From Marks?" echoed Billie incredulously. "Why, I heard him say that he'd never let you have another cent after letting your note go to protest."

"He changed his mind," replied Robert laconically, "when he saw the security I offered him."

"Security? What security?"

"Something I wouldn't have parted with for untold gold—save in an emergency like that. I had to have the money. It was a case of making a quick raise or putting a bullet through my brain. I took him that locket and chain which were on my neck when Mr. Forrester found me on his doorstep. Marks advanced me eight hundred on it. The rest, as I told you, I won from those thugs who tried to give me the strong arm. Before I left for Europe I went down to the Bowery for the purpose of redeeming the jewelry, but the old man was away. I intend to go to see him to-morrow."

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Billie's face brightened.

"Oh, I was jolly sure everything could be explained," he grinned. "Yet there's still something I don't understand. When you went away you didn't seem to care whether they ever got the murderer or not. Why have you suddenly taken so keen an interest in the case?"

"Because I'm in love," answered Forrester seriously.

"In love—you in love!"

Billie laughed boisterously, as if the mere suggestion of Bob Forrester, the cynic, being in love were comical in the extreme.

"Yes, Billie," went on Forrester gravely. "We all make mis-deals in our life. Sometimes we don't shuffle the cards right. You remember I used to scoff at the idea of any woman being able to influence a man. I've changed my mind since I went abroad. With a good woman for a companion a man is capable of attaining anything. A bad woman will drag him down to hell. I've met a good woman. I'm going to marry her. But first I must clear away this stain on my name. You understand?"

It was something new to hear Bob Forrester talk in this fashion. Billie stared and pinched himself to make sure that he was awake.

"That's why I came back," went on Forrester. "To find that man, so I can go to the woman I love and say: 'You see, the world condemned me unjustly. This is the guilty man—not I.'"

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"The trail's pretty cold by this time," interrupted Billie. "What became of Trehern? At one time you suspected him."

"I'm convinced now that Trehern knows nothing about it. I saw him in Paris. It was he who furnished me with the most important clue I have."

"A clue?" ejaculated Billie, opening his eyes wide in astonishment. "What clue?"

Forrester took from his pocket a newspaper clipping.

"You remember," he said, "that the stolen securities were numbered. It appears that two of the bonds were offered for sale in Chicago recently." Holding out the clipping, he added: "Did you see this?"

Forrester watched his companion until he had read it through. Then, with significant emphasis, he said:

"The man in the blue spectacles is the man who murdered John Forrester."

A sudden light seemed to break in upon Billie's none too alert intellect. Handing back the clipping, he rose from his chair. For a moment he was so excited he could not articulate.

"Blue spectacles!" he gasped.

"Yes, blue spectacles," repeated Forrester. "What is there so wonderful about blue spectacles?"

"Nothing—nothing," stammered Billie. His hands shaking with nervous trembling, he took back the clipping and read aloud:

"The person who offered the bonds for sale was an elderly man with gray hair and a slight stoop and he wore blue spectacles."

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The paper fell from Billie's trembling hands. He turned pale and clutched at the table as if for support.

"What's the matter, man?" exclaimed Forrester.

"Good God!" cried Billie. "It isn't possible! It's only a coincidence, of course."

"What's a coincidence?" cried Forrester.

"The clue!" almost shouted Billie, white with suppressed excitement. "It's hotter than I dreamed of. I have reason to believe that I was talking to that man—the man with the blue spectacles—only a few days ago."

It was now Forrester's turn to be aroused. Jumping from his seat, he bounded over to where Billie was standing.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You talked a few days ago with a man fitting that description?"

Billie nodded. He was too excited to talk.

"Where is he—who is he?" cried Forrester hoarsely.

Billie collapsed into a chair.

"Can it be possible? Can it be possible?" he exclaimed.

Forrester seized Billie roughly by the shoulders. Breathing hard, his eyes flashing, he exclaimed:

"Speak up, man! Who is it? Who is the man you mean?"

Billie looked at him in silence for a moment or two. Then slowly he replied:

"The man I mean is Richard Bryce—your uncle's attorney!"

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"What?" shouted Forrester.

His face white, his hands nervously clutching the back of his chair, he stared at Billie as if he had gone mad.

"Bryce, did you say? Bryce?"

Briefly, Billie acquainted him with the series of mishaps which during the last few years had befallen the lawyer—his luckless financial operations, his possession of unaccounted for funds, his sudden departure for the West and his unexpected reappearance in Wall Street, threadbare and shabby.

"But the blue spectacles?" interrupted Forrester, puzzled. "As long as I've known him Bryce never wore spectacles of any kind."

"All the more reason to suspect there was some reason why he wished to escape recognition," replied Billie. "The man I spoke to was Richard Bryce, and he wore blue spectacles. Now I come to think of it, he said he was trying to dispose of some securities. I asked him what they were, but he wouldn't tell me. Still it seems impossible that——"

Forrester held up his hand.

"Stop! Don't spoil it Billie. For once in your life you've hit the nail square on the head. You've got my man. Yes, it is astounding, almost incredible, but I believe he is the man."

"No—no—there must be some mistake!" protested Billie.

Forrester paid no attention. His eyes almost starting from his head, his fists clenched, he was nervously

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pacing the room like a tiger impatient to be let loose after its prey.

"Ah, I see it all now," he cried. "That is the secret of his life-long hostility to me. He was jealous of me. He was greedy for the money he knew would one day be mine. He poisoned Mr. Forrester's mind against me, and I, unwittingly, by my recklessness, helped along the plot. He had gambled secretly in Wall Street for years. He lost and had to make good. He was almost constantly at Mr. Forrester's house, he knew the money and bonds were within easy reach, and one night, when he was goaded to desperation, he yielded to the temptation. The crime once committed, he schemed how to shield himself. He at once saw that it would be easy to direct suspicion on me. You recall that he was the most vehement of my accusers. His plot to entangle me failed, but he had already secured the bonds, and these he is now trying to sell."

"But the second will?" objected Billie. "He had no interest in destroying that—on the contrary. How did that disappear?"

"That is explained," replied Forrester. "The will was picked up and destroyed by Trehern. He confesses that he went to the house to rob it. When he got there the murder was done. Who did it? That's what we are trying to find out. The main point is that a man wearing spectacles has been trying to sell the stolen securities. From your description I believe that man to be Richard Bryce. What we've got to

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do now is to find Bryce. The question is, where's he to be found?"

"Shall you go to the police?"

"No," replied Forrester grimly. "I've had enough of the police. I'll be my own Sherlock Holmes."

The next few days were spent scouring the city for Bryce. While Forrester visited the smaller hotels, Billie spent hours playing the sleuth in Wall Street in the hope of seeing the lawyer. But there was no trace of him. He had disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up.

"To-morrow I'll go to Chicago," said Forrester. "It is possible that he has returned there. If the trail leads further West I'll go on. I'll follow him wherever he is, even if the trail leads to hell. But before I go I'll run down to the Bowery and get my locket and chain from old Marks. The jewelry may act as my mascot."

CHAPTER XI

MR. MARKS had his office on the top floor of a ramshackle three-story house in Delancey Street, one of the most thickly populated and evil smelling of the congested East side's many dirty and squalid thoroughfares. Less than a block away was the Bowery, the world's most notorious haunt of vice and crime, the Fifth Avenue of the slums, strangely fascinating in its repellent ugliness, lined with liquor saloons, pawnbrokers, cheap dance halls, peddler's push carts, fence and junk shops, ten cent lodging-houses, dime museums, its filthy sidewalks crowded with a poverty-pinched, sinister, bedraggled humanity, representing every race under the sun, every degree of human wretchedness and degradation—pallid sweat-shop workers, hollow-eyed factory girls, flashy street-walkers, thieves and pick-pockets, tattered vagrants, starved children eating scraps found in garbage cans. Here drifted the flotsam and jetsam of the vast and wealthy metropolis on the ebb and flow of life's tide.

Forrester had no difficulty in finding the place. It was not his first visit. Many a time in the old days he had been there before in quest of money. Climbing the three flights of rickety, grimy stairs, he finally

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came to a door on which was inscribed, in crudely-written characters, this legend:

JOSEPH MARKS

LOANS

He knocked, and receiving no answer, turned the knob and walked in.

Mr. Marks was seated at the window in his shirt sleeves, carefully examining a diamond through a magnifying glass. The old money lender's back was to the door, and he did not turn round when his visitor entered.

"Is that you, Mary?" he called out.

"No," answered Forrester, "it's not Mary. It's an old friend come to see you."

Hearing an unfamiliar voice, the old man dropped his work and quickly turned round. Being short sighted, he did not at first recognize his caller.

"I thought it was the girl. She went to the store," he explained. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"What! Am I so changed that you don't know me?" laughed Forrester.

The old man came nearer and peered up in his face

"Yes—I know that voice." Then, with a gesture of surprise, he exclaimed: "Lord save me, if it isn't Robert Forrester!"

"Yes—back from Europe. I'm only here for a few days. To-morrow I'm off to Chiacgo on im-

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portant business. I've come to redeem that locket and chain which I left with you. Here's the money, with interest."

Taking a roll of bank notes from his pocket, he counted out \$900 and threw the bills on the desk.

"Well, well! This is a surprise!" said Marks, as he picked up the money. "I'm real glad to see you, Mr. Forrester. I always liked you. We've had our little difficulties, of course, but I hope there's no hard feeling. Your locket and chain are all right. They've been in the safe ever since you were here that night. I promised you I would never mention that I had them, and I kept my word. I didn't even say anything about it at the inquest, although the information would have gone far to vindicate you. That was a pretty close call for you, Mr. Forrester. For a time things looked bad. I don't suppose they'll ever find out who did kill the old man."

"Maybe they won't—maybe they will!" answered Forrester laconically. "One never can tell. The world is full of surprises. Let me see the locket."

Marks went to the safe, and opening a drawer brought back the little white box. Taking the trinkets out, Forrester handled them lovingly.

"I think I'll wear the chain," he said after a silence. "I've never worn it, but there is no reason why I shouldn't."

"Wear the locket too," said Marks cheerily. "Locketts are the fashion now. Come in here and I'll clean it for you."

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Opening a little gate, he invited Robert to enter his private sitting-room, which was just off the main office.

"Sit down," he said cordially. "It's a pleasant surprise you've given me. Wait, I'll make your locket look like new. How did you like things abroad? Won't you have something to drink?"

So the old man chatted on, running from one subject to another, trying to be amiable, feeling honored at this visit from an old customer. While he talked, he polished the chain vigorously with a piece of wash leather.

"I suppose you heard what happened to Mr. Bryce," he said.

"Yes—serve him right," replied Robert.

"That's what I say," answered Marks. "No one has a kind word for that man. Well, he's down and out for good. He's been here several times to borrow money. I wouldn't give him a cent."

"Do you know where he is now?" asked Forrester carelessly.

"No," replied Marks, "I haven't seen him for months. The last time he was here I turned him down in such short order that I don't think I'll ever see him again."

At that moment there was a noise in the outer office. Someone had come in.

"Is that you, Mary?" called out Marks.

There was no answer.

"It's a customer," said Marks.

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He rose and went out to see who it was, leaving Robert alone in the back parlor.

From the distance Forrester heard the money lender greet the newcomer, and by the hum of the conversation that followed he concluded that it was someone come to negotiate a loan. Certainly he had no wish to intrude on other people's business or to be seen himself. There were particular reasons why no one should know of this visit to Marks's office. He would wait until the man had gone, and then slip away himself. To-morrow he would start for Chicago, and then the work of running down the mysterious man with the blue spectacles would begin in earnest. Was Bryce really the man they wanted or was Billie mistaken? He wondered what Virginia was doing, if she ever thought of him, if they would ever meet again, and what they would say to each other if they did meet. That she loved him he firmly believed. His own passion for her grew stronger with each succeeding day, and it burned all the more fiercely in his heart because he realized how many obstacles and prejudices had yet to be overcome before he could hope to win her. Would she be satisfied when he had unmasked Bryce as the murderer of the old merchant? Would that vindicate him wholly in her eyes? Could she forget the follies of his old life?

Suddenly the voices in the outer room were raised in angry altercation. Forrester heard Marks say:

"'Tain't no use arguing. I tell you I won't do it."

"You can't?" persisted the man anxiously.

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"I can, but I won't!" replied the money lender dryly.

"If you can't give me \$200, at least let me have \$50," pleaded the stranger. "I'm good for it. You know that."

Suddenly Forrester started, and listened attentively. There was something in the voice that made him think he had heard it before.

"I'll have plenty of money in a few days," went on the man. "I'm trying to realize on some securities. I'll pay you a hundred per cent. for the temporary loan."

Forrester leaped to his feet, his heart beating tumultuously. That voice! He knew where he had heard it now! It was the voice of the man he was hunting—the voice of Richard Bryce! In his excitement he stumbled against a chair.

"What's that noise? Is someone in there?" asked Bryce suspiciously.

"I guess it's the cat," growled Marks. Impatiently he added: "Sorry, but I can't do anything for you. Good day."

He turned his back, waiting for his caller to take his departure, but Mr. Bryce still lingered. His manner was nervous and embarrassed, as if he still had a card to play—some proposition to make—but did not know how to present it. Unbuttoning his coat and lowering his voice, he said:

"I can leave with you security worth twenty times fifty dollars."

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"That's different," rejoined Marks, always ready to make a good business deal. "What security have you to offer?"

Bryce drew a folded document from his pocket and handed it over.

"Look at that! It's a bond of the N. Y. Central. The market value is \$950. I guess you'll lend me \$50 on that."

Marks glanced at the bond, and, shaking his head, he passed it back.

"If that bond was any good you wouldn't have to come round here," he said suspiciously.

"Certainly it's good—why shouldn't it be good? Do you think I stole it?" cried the lawyer hotly.

"I don't say you did, although queerer things have happened," rejoined the money lender laconically. "Anyhow, I don't like the looks of it. I can't take the risk."

With a gesture of mingled annoyance and discouragement, Bryce replaced the bond in his pocket, and, buttoning his coat, prepared to depart. Marks left the office, and was returning to the sitting-room when Forrester, concealed behind the door, pushed him back.

"Don't let him go," he whispered. "Get the number of the bond. It's important."

Mr. Marks stared, bewildered, not understanding. "Quick!" exclaimed Forrester. "Look at the bond. Let me see it."

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Still puzzled, Mr. Marks shuffled back into the outer office. Bryce had already opened the door leading to the stairs.

"Good-by, Mr. Marks," he said, with an attempt at jocularity. "I hope you'll never need fifty dollars as badly as I do now, or if you do that you'll never run up against such a hard proposition as you are."

"Don't run away so fast," replied Marks. "No doesn't always mean 'no' in our business. Let me see the bond again."

Bryce's face brightened. He came back into the office, and taking the bond from his pocket handed it to Marks.

"It's all right, you see," said Bryce eagerly. "The market is low just now, and I can't sell it without loss. But it's all the security you want."

"Got any more like this?" asked Marks.

"What business is that of yours?" demanded Bryce uneasily. Impatiently, he went on: "Come, will you advance me \$50 on it or not? My time is worth something."

"Gracious, how impatient you are!" ejaculated Marks. "Wait until I get my spectacles. I can't see without my glasses."

The money lender returned to the inner room, taking with him the bond, which he immediately handed to Forrester. The latter inspected it hurriedly. It was a New York Central bond, numbered Series A, 832. It was one of those stolen.

"Take it," said Forrester in a tense whisper. "I'll

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guarantee you from loss. And get his address at all costs."

Marks ambled back into the outer office, and after making some pretence to examine the bond he opened his till and slowly counted out ten bills of five dollars each. Then taking pen and pad he again confronted Bryce.

"Your address?" he asked.

Bryce hesitated.

"What do you want that for?" he demanded suspiciously.

"It's the rule of this office," replied Marks doggedly.

"Suppose I don't care to give it?"

"Then you don't get the money."

"I could easily give you a false one."

"You won't, for I hold your bond."

"Oh, I've no objection, of course. You can address me 438 Lexington Avenue."

"Here's your \$50."

The lawyer took up the money, and putting it in his pocket turned to go.

"I'll be back before long to redeem the bond."

"No hurry," replied Marks laconically. "I guess my \$50 is all right."

"Good day," said the lawyer.

"Good day," replied Marks.

The door slammed and the money lender returned to the parlor.

"You got his address?" said Forrester eagerly.

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"Yes, there it is," replied Marks.

Forrester put it away in his pocket. Then turning again to Marks, he said:

"Now give me the bond."

"Give you the bond!" echoed the money lender.
"What do you want with the bond?"

"I want it—that's enough. Give it to me," insisted Forrester.

"You can't have the bond. It's my security," replied Marks.

Forrester took a roll of bills from his pocket.

"Here's your \$50. Give me the bond."

"I can't. He left it with me as security. He'll come back for it."

"He'll never come back for it," said Forrester significantly.

"How do you know?" demanded Marks, surprised.

"Because that bond was stolen. You don't want to be arrested for receiving stolen goods, do you?"

The money lender nearly fell over from astonishment.

"You mean to say——" he gasped.

"That bond is one of those stolen the night Mr. Forrester was murdered."

"Then this man Bryce——"

Forrester nodded.

"Just so. He can tell us a good deal about what happened the night of the murder."

Forrester put the bond in his pocket, and turned to depart.

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"So you're going to Chicago to-morrow?" said the old man.

Forrester shook his head.

"No. I've changed my mind. To-morrow I'm going to 438 Lexington Avenue to see Mr. Bryce."

CHAPTER XII

IT was with an almost broken heart that Virginia returned to the Rue Galvani to pack up before returning to America. She decided to go back home immediately, without waiting even to learn the decision of the Salon jury in regard to her picture. The events of the last few weeks, the strange meeting with Robert Forrester, her distressing, humiliating experience on the tower of Notre Dame, followed by the sudden tragedy in Brussels—all this had completely unnerved her. She felt that she would not again breathe freely until she got entirely away from the scenes associated with so many sad and embarrassing memories.

Vivie's death was so unexpected, so shocking, so inexpressibly sad that, for a time, Virginia was incapable of either thought or action. Unable to cope single handed with the emergency, exhausted by her constant vigils by the sick girl's bedside, she felt she must have someone to help and advise her. She was on the point of telegraphing for Robert, but she dare not. She could not trust herself to see him again. The most she could allow herself to do was to answer his letter and try to discourage him. She wired for Harry Graham, who hurried to Brussels and relieved her of many painful duties.

To Virginia it all seemed a bad dream from which

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at any moment they might awaken. It was impossible for her to realize that her cheerful, loyal little comrade was dead, and even when confronted with the cruel reality, even when she saw the white coffin, heaped high with the beautiful flowers sent by the singer's fellow artists at the Opera House, taken to the little cemetery beyond the city where they laid her to rest, it all appeared like some awful nightmare. Directly Virginia reached Brussels she saw that Vivie was desperately ill, but it never dawned upon her that this sweet, bright little life was drawing to a tragic close. Other people fall ill, but they get well again. Why should Vivie be fatally stricken just at a moment when success, so long desired and eagerly striven for, seemed within reach? They did everything possible to save her, but all efforts were in vain. Her constitution was undermined by hard work, and death claimed its victim. The poor girl died in Virginia's arms, cheerful and hopeful to the last, prattling of plans for next season. She made a brave fight for life, and Virginia turned away to hide her tears. Before the end came she was mercifully unconscious. Just before she closed her eyes she whispered:

"I've got there at last, dear. The fight is won. Next year I'll go home, and you'll all be proud of me."

When all was over Virginia returned with Graham to Paris. She had cabled Mr. Bryce, informing him of the catastrophe, and when she reached the Rue Galvani she found a letter from him. The lawyer expressed great grief at his loss, spoke briefly of his

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changed fortunes and gave her his new address, 438 Lexington Avenue, where, he said, she should send what belongings Vivie might have left. He said he would like to see Virginia, of course, on her arrival in America, but he asked her not to mention his whereabouts to anyone, as his creditors were giving him much trouble.

Mme. Garache had told Virginia of Forrester's frequent calls during her absence.

"When was he here? Did he say he would call again?" questioned Virginia falteringly.

With a cunning leer, which was meant to be an amiable smile, the hirsute janitress replied:

"The last time the Monsieur came was a week ago. He drove up in a cab. He said he was going to America. When I told him you were still in Brussels he looked so disappointed I felt sorry for him."

In spite of her effort to appear outwardly unconcerned, the woman's idle remark caused the blood to rush wildly through Virginia's veins, and it was with a lighter heart that she turned the key and entered the deserted apartment. He still loved her then and was determined to see her again, notwithstanding her cold letter of dismissal? Had he guessed that her coldness was only assumed, and that she still loved him no matter what opinion the world had of him? Since that afternoon when she fled from him on the tower she had lived hours of mental torture. It seemed to her that she had deliberately cast aside the only real happiness she had ever known in her life.

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She still saw his dark, troubled eyes looking down at her, she still heard his rich, passionate voice pleading with her. Why did she flee from him? Because she was taken by surprise. Her woman's dignity was aroused. She thought she had been imposed upon. It was only when she found herself alone that she realized how much she loved him. She would have given anything to recall what she had said, to be able to throw herself once more in his arms. Of course he was innocent of that dreadful crime, but would he succeed in solving the mystery and clearing his own name? There could be no happiness in their union unless he were able to do that. It was scarcely possible that he would succeed now after so long an interval. Perhaps it were better to forget and never see each other again.

The voyage home was uneventful and tiresome. There was no one on the steamer whom she knew, and she hardly felt in the mood to form new acquaintances. The time hung heavy on her hands. She tried to read, but her mind was not on her book, and abandoning herself to her thoughts she sat for hours in her chair on deck, trying to read in the idle expanse of tumbling waters what the future had in store for her. She wondered if she could ever be the same again. Before meeting this man, who exercised so strange a power over her, she had been independent, free, without a care, happy in her work, thoroughly contented. Now everything was changed. Her work no longer interested her, her thoughts turned con-

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stantly in but one direction, she seemed to be ever waiting for someone who never came.

Her sister, Mrs. Townsend, and the three children met her at the dock, and it was a joyful reunion. With wild yells of delight, Pip, Toto and Curley, now two years older, broke away from their mother and raced up the gangplank to give Aunt Virginia a hug of welcome. Their greeting was so exuberant that Virginia's eyes filled with tears. Ah, it felt good to be home, among one's own again, after having gone through so much!

Mrs. Townsend noticed that her sister was looking pale and tired. There were lines about her face and a seriousness in her manner that even grief over Vivie could not explain. She said nothing, expecting Virginia to confide in her, but when they had reached the house and the latter was still reticent she felt it was her duty to ascertain the cause. Something, she was sure, was wrong, and her woman's instinct told her that the man whom her sister had written about was the cause. Discreetly she brought up the subject.

"And your hero, dear? You say nothing about him."

Virginia's face grew whiter, and she remained silent.

"Aren't you interested in him any more?" went on Mrs. Townsend. "Your letters led me to suppose it was more serious."

"It is serious," replied Virginia, in a low tone. "I promised to be his wife."

Mrs. Townsend threw her arms round her sister's neck, exclaiming:

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"Oh, I'm so glad, dear! Any man you cared for must be a fine fellow. When shall we see him?"

"I don't know," said Virginia hesitatingly.

"You don't know?" exclaimed Mrs. Townsend surprised. "You're engaged to him, and you don't know when you'll see him?"

A look of distress came into Virginia's face.

"Don't mention him, please, Lily. There is something I cannot explain now. You will know everything, but not now—not now. There is a reason. I can't explain." Earnestly she added: "I love him with all my heart, and he is a splendid fellow. That's all I can tell you. Please ask no more."

Mrs. Townsend kissed her and said no more, and gradually Virginia settled down into the same life she had known before she went abroad.

A few days after her arrival she determined to make her visit of duty to Mr. Bryce. Mrs. Townsend wanted to go with her, but Virginia gently dissuaded her.

"No, dear," she said. "The poor man may be embarrassed. He asked me to keep his address secret. You are a stranger to him. Coming direct from poor Vivie, he would prefer to see me alone."

So the following morning Virginia sent for a cab and was driven to No. 438 Lexington Avenue. At first she had some difficulty in finding the place, for the numbers on the doors were worn off from age, and the house itself was shabby and cheap looking. In answer to her ring a dirty and disreputable looking maid of all work appeared.

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"Is Mr. Bryce in?" inquired Virginia.

"Does he expect yez, Miss?" asked the girl, eyeing the stylishly dressed visitor with doubtful surprise.

"Yes," replied Virginia. "Mr. Bryce wrote me to come."

The girl opened the door wide and gave a curtsy.

"Excuse me, Miss, but he's told us to be careful. That's why I asked." With a jerk of her hand towards the staircase she added: "It's top floor front, Miss. There's a gentleman up there with him now, Miss."

Virginia hesitated.

"I'd better wait till he's alone," she said.

"Oh, you can go up, Miss," said the girl confidently. "The party will be right down. I guess."

Virginia began the long climb up the rickety staircase, dust rising from the threadbare carpet at each step she took. Up and up she went, the stairs turning and turning, until Virginia began to wonder if she would ever reach the top. It reminded her of the tower of Notre Dame. When she finally reached the top landing she heard men's voices raised as if in anger. She stopped and listened. Two men were speaking. One was Mr. Bryce, the other a much younger man, judging by the firmer tones. Suddenly the blood rushed to her face, and then receding left her deathly pale. She clutched at the banisters to prevent herself from falling. She knew only one man who had a voice like that. It was the voice of Robert Forrester.

CHAPTER XIII

EARLY that same morning Richard Bryce had stood at the window of his attic bedroom, watching the rush of traffic on the avenue. Street cars went swiftly by crowded to the guard rails, milk wagons passed at homicidal speed, labor's army was on the march, thousands of workers of both sexes, clerks, shop girls, factory hands, all hurrying in one direction, anxious to begin the day's toil.

"Another long, dreary day to live through," muttered the lawyer to himself. "If I don't succeed in raising more money to-day, how will it end?"

It was a wretched room for a man who had known what it is to enjoy the best. Stripped of everything save the common necessities—a plain wooden cot, a broken-down washstand, a grimy table and two rickety chairs, it suggested a prison cell rather than a furnished room in a metropolitan lodging house. A shred of torn matting near the bed was the only apology for covering on the floor, the keen March wind howled dismally through the cracked window pane, the sloping ceiling overhead was discolored by the rain which had percolated through the leaky roof. A miserable hole, yet it was more than its present occupant could do to raise the \$3 a week that it cost.

The lawyer's personal appearance was quite in harmony with his surroundings. He looked in even

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worse condition than when Billie had met him in Wall Street. His clothes were threadbare and wrinkled, his linen torn and soiled. He was unshaven, and his features pinched and careworn. He looked as if he did not have enough to eat. There was a hunted, apprehensive expression in his face, and the slightest sound made him start violently. He paced the room nervously, going from the window to the table and back again.

Presently there was a knock at the door and Patsey, the hired girl, came in carrying a tray of coffee and rolls. It was a welcome sight to the lawyer, who had not broken his fast. The meal was an inexpensive one—coffee and rolls brought from a nearby restaurant—but to the half-famished lawyer it tasted more delicious than the elaborate meals which, in the hey day of his prosperity he had ordered at the expensive hotels, when he thought nothing of tipping the waiter a dollar. Richard Bryce's pride had gone the way of his money. He was glad enough now to get what he could.

Patsey lingered for a moment, interested in watching the old man devour the rolls. She felt sorry for him. She knew he was down on his luck and she guessed that he had been accustomed to better things. He did not give her as much trouble as some of the other lodgers. He never got drunk and did not throw things at her.

"Does yez want nothin' else, Sorr?" she asked in her rich Irish brogue.

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"No, Patsey—that's all!" answered Bryce wearily. Left alone, Mr. Bryce drank his coffee in silence. When he had finished he arose and went again to the window. It was not likely that Miss Norman would come to-day—the weather was too threatening. He must go out and make another effort to raise money. He was literally at the end of his rope. The fifty dollars given him by Marks had already gone to satisfy an irate landlady. But for that, he would have had neither a bed last night nor breakfast this morning.

With a gesture of discouragement, he sank into the rickety arm-chair and closed his eyes. He began to think, reviewing rapidly in his mind the hundred and one acts of folly which had brought him to his present desperate situation.

He saw himself a young man just graduated from a Western law school, starting out in the world with the promise of a brilliant career, eager to learn all that life had to teach, to enjoy all the pleasures it had to offer, fond of dress, vain, ambitious to acquire money, position, power. Ah, that had been his undoing! The love of gold. For that he had bartered his soul, stifled his conscience, stopped at nothing. He married, not because he loved the girl but because she brought him money. He regarded his wife as a chattel he had purchased, and so despised her. She, innocent, trustful, surrendered to him her entire personal fortune. It all went, squandered recklessly, and when there was nothing left he blamed her. They had words and in a fit of blind fury he struck her.

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She left his house, carrying her babe with her, and a few days later her lifeless body was found in New York floating in the East River. What she had done with the child no one ever knew. This was the beginning of his undoing. Ostracised by all his acquaintances, in danger of being ruined socially and professionally by the scandal, he left Buffalo and came to New York where he was not known, and where the wider field offered more opportunities to his ambition. Wall Street, particularly, attracted him as a way to quick wealth, and he started headlong on the game that has hastened thousands to their graves. His sister died, leaving an only daughter. He needed someone to look after his home, so he had sent for Vivie and brought her up as his his own. And now she had been taken from him. Was it Heaven's punishment that in his old age he should be absolutely alone in the world? He had made the acquaintance of John Forrester. Stimulated by the merchant's wealth, once more his mind was filled with projects for acquiring wealth quickly. He resumed his stock gambling operations, taking the most reckless chances, concealing the extent of his losses, which were enormous. Then one day he stood on the brink. He must have \$25,000 at once. He went to Mr. Forrester, as he had done many times before, but the merchant, knowing his weakness and wishing to teach him a lesson, firmly refused to lend him a cent. Ah! well he remembered his words—"I have the money right here in my safe, but I won't let you squander it in stock gambling."

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He did not know which way to turn, his brokers were clamoring for money. Ruin, disgrace stared him in the face—well, all that was past and gone! He had staved off that storm, yet what had been the good? Here he was to-day starving in a garret, afraid of every step he heard on the stairs.

Suddenly his reflections were disturbed by a noise on the landing outside. Then there came a knock on the door.

“Is that you, Patsey?” called out Bryce.

The door opened and, to the lawyer’s amazement, a tall, dark man entered, saying:

“No, Mr. Bryce, it’s not Patsey. It’s I—Robert Forrester!”

Bryce bounded up from his chair. For a moment utter astonishment paralyzed his powers of speech. Of all persons in the world this man, whom he had tried his best to send to the electric chair, whom he believed thousands of miles away, was the very last he would have expected to see enter. It was like an apparition from the dead, and not entirely free from superstition, the lawyer’s first movement was one of fear. A premonition of impending peril came over him, and he broke into a profuse perspiration. Something told him that it was on no ordinary errand that this man had come. Yet what had he to apprehend? None knew his secret. To show fear was to betray himself. Trembling in every limb, yet with an attempt at composure, he advanced towards the intruder.

“May I ask to what I am indebted for the honor of

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this most unexpected visit?" he asked in a voice in which nervousness and acerbity mingled.

Forrester came further into the room, his demeanor calm and grave. Quietly taking a seat, he proceeded deliberately to draw off his gloves.

Was it possible, he thought to himself, as he noted Bryce's attenuated figure, pinched features, shabby clothes and squalid surroundings, that this was the man who only two years ago was a successful professional man, highly esteemed in the community, always faultlessly groomed and dressed, and now a broken-down old man, a fugitive and a criminal? So he had found him at last! This was the man he had crossed the seas to find, the man with the blue spectacles, the man who had so cruelly wronged him first by prejudicing and poisoning his benefactor's mind against him, then by trying to brand him with a crime he had himself committed. This was Bryce the perjurer, Bryce the murderer. Little did he suspect how close at hand was his Nemesis! Forrester could have shouted for joy when he saw how completely he had this man at his mercy. Yes, vengeance is sweet! This scoundrel, this conscienceless hypocrite, who tried to send him to the gallows, would have a taste of his own medicine. He should have everything coming to him. He would show him no mercy. His heart would be as steel. He would not rest until he had handed him over to justice and seen him pay the penalty of his crime. As he looked at the man's cringing, almost pathetic figure, he wondered why the lawyer had pur-

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sued him all his life with his hatred. Was there some reason he did not know or had it merely been to advance his selfish interests?

"You hardly expected to see me, Mr. Bryce?" he said.

The lawyer eyed his caller keenly, trying to read in his face some clue to the meaning of his mysterious visit. With an attempt at biting sarcasm, he replied:

"I confess I'm a bit surprised. I should have thought that after what is past you would have had enough of New York for some time to come."

Forrester bit his lip and moved restlessly on his chair, but by an effort of will, he controlled himself.

"You refer, of course, to the murder," he said coldly. Trying to meet squarely the lawyer's shifting eyes, he went on: "Do you still believe I had a hand in that affair, Mr. Bryce?"

The lawyer fidgetted uneasily as he answered evasively:

"I would rather not be asked for my opinion."

"Yet you know that the coroner's jury exonerated me," insisted Forrester.

"You mean that they failed to hold you," corrected the lawyer with a sardonic smile and shrug of his shoulders. "It is a legal distinction which makes a material difference."

"So you still believe I killed John Forrester?"

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders and replied impatiently:

"I have ceased to give the matter any thought."

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With growing irritation and uneasiness, he went on: "You didn't come here to ask me that, did you?"

"No," said Forrester slowly. "As I had nothing whatever to do with the murder it isn't likely that I should take up your time with a matter of such little consequence. My business here to-day is more serious."

"Well, what is it—come to the point, man," cried the lawyer. Forrester's cool deliberative manner was beginning to get on his nerves. "What is it you want of me?"

Forrester bent forward, and slowly, with emphasis on every word, he answered:

"I want you to help me find the man who killed John Forrester!"

The lawyer gave an involuntary start.

"You want me to help you," he cried. "How can I help you?"

"You can be of great assistance," said Forrester, drawing his chair up to the table. Taking a piece of paper and a pencil from his pocket, he continued: "Certain securities disappeared on the night of the murder. The assumption was that the murderer took them. Can you tell me what the securities were and what their numbers were? You had such a list at the time of the inquest, if I remember right."

Bryce looked keenly at his interrogator, as if he would like to read his thoughts. Shifting uneasily on his chair, he said:

"Before I answer your question I would like to put

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one to you. What is your interest in re-opening a case which everybody has forgotten long ago?"

Forrester met his gaze firmly and squarely.

"Because," he answered slowly and deliberately, "I don't choose any longer to remain under the stigma of a crime committed by another, because I am tired of being suspected of a horrible murder while the real perpetrator of it is walking the streets a free man. Before I did not care. I was utterly indifferent to what the world thought of me. Now it is different. I see the injustice I did to myself. I want to clear my name from this disgraceful, this damnable stain. I have taken a solemn oath not to rest day or night until I have found this man and handed him over to justice."

Bryce took a handkerchief from his pocket and nervously wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Well, how are you going about it? Whom do you suspect?" he demanded querulously.

"I suspect the man who has those stolen securities now in his possession," replied Forrester quickly.

He looked directly at the lawyer, and their eyes met. Bryce averted his eyes instantly and changed color. Forrester noticed the embarrassment and smiled. He continued:

"This is exactly where you can help me, Mr. Bryce. What were those securities?"

"I can't remember just now—I don't recollect," stammered the lawyer nervously.

"You must have some idea," insisted Forrester. "You were most positive on the subject of the securi-

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ties at the time of the inquest. There were railroad bonds and \$25,000 in currency."

"It's a long time ago," faltered the lawyer. "My memory fails me."

"Perhaps I can refreshen your memory," said Forrester, taking up his list. "Let's see. There were New York Central bonds Series A 824, A 825, A 826. Also Series A 831, A 832 and others. Am I right?"

May be—may be! snapped the lawyer viciously. "What of it?"

Forrester paused like an actor who reaches a crucial situation in a drama. Then watching Bryce closely, he said:

"A New York Central bond Series A 832 was offered for sale in Chicago recently."

"Yes," replied the lawyer with affected carelessness, "you saw that in the papers."

"So—you saw it, too, did you!" retorted Forrester quickly. "I thought you said you weren't interested?"

"I happened to run across the paragraph while reading—that's all," replied Bryce, trying to regain his composure.

Each moment he was growing more and more uncomfortable, and he unbuttoned his coat, as if he were feeling too warm. As he threw the coat open, Forrester's quick eye noticed a pair of blue spectacles in the vest pocket.

"I didn't know you wore spectacles," he said, quietly pointing to the glasses.

"Yes," replied Bryce in confusion, "my eyes have

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been giving me trouble of late. I can't read without them."

"Those are not reading glasses," said Forrester. "They are blue."

"Yes," stammered Bryce, "too strong a light hurts my eyes. I have to be careful."

"It's a curious coincidence," said Forrester dryly. "Only a coincidence, of course, but the man who tried to negotiate the bonds in Chicago wore blue spectacles."

"What's all this to me?" demanded Bryce hotly. "If you want your man, you had better go to Chicago and look for him."

"It's not necessary to go so far," replied Forrester grimly. "That same man—the man with the blue spectacles—is now in New York. Only yesterday he negotiated the same bond in a money lender's office in Delancey street."

The lawyer, who had gradually grown an ashy white, started to his feet. Nothing was to be gained by further dissimulation. There could be no mistake as to whom his visitor meant. Both men understood each other now. Forrester also had risen and stood confronting his old enemy, prepared for any emergency, aware that the lawyer was desperate and capable of anything. They faced each other in silence. Forrester, stern, implacable. The lawyer livid, almost ready to collapse. Both were so engrossed that neither heard a slight noise on the landing outside. It sounded as if

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someone had come up the stairs and had halted outside the door.

"Well! out with it, man. What's the use of beating about the bush in this fashion? Say at once that I'm the man you suspect," panted the lawyer.

"Yes, you, Richard Bryce!—hypocrite! liar! thief! murderer!—you are the man!"

The lawyer's eyes flashed dangerously and for a moment he looked as though he might spring forward and seize Forrester by the throat. Whatever his intentions were, he thought better of it, for, dropping into his chair, he gave a nervous laugh and said:

"I guess you'll have a hard job to prove it!"

"I don't think so," replied Forrester coolly. "I can prove that you tried to negotiate the stolen securities."

"You lie!" shouted the lawyer.

Forrester drew from his pocket the bond which he had taken from Marks. Holding it up, he said:

"This does not lie, Mr. Bryce. This bond you had in your possession yesterday. You went to the office of Marks, the money lender in Delancey street, and got him to lend you \$50 on it. It is one of the stolen bonds."

"It's a lie—a d—d lie!" shrieked the lawyer. "I never saw the bond before. I was never in the office you mention in my life."

"More falsehoods will not help you, Bryce," said Forrester sternly. "You were in Mark's office, for I saw you there. I was in the back room and heard the entire transaction. Here is the bond which you had



"SAY AT ONCE THAT I AM THE MAN YOU SUSPECT."

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already tried to sell in Chicago and on which you raised \$50 yesterday. The Grand Jury will indict you on that alone!"

"The Grand Jury!" faltered the lawyer. "Do you mean to say that you will——"

Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead. His hands shook as if from palsy.

"It is my irrevocable determination to lay all the facts in my possession at once before the district attorney," replied Forrester coldly. "If you are innocent you have nothing to fear."

"What is your motive in hounding me in this manner?" gasped the lawyer. "What have I done to you?"

"What have you done to me?" exclaimed Forrester fiercely. "You helped to wreck my life. I never wronged you, yet you hated me ever since I was a child. You poisoned Mr. Forrester's mind against me, exaggerating my every action, telling deliberate lies about me, making me appear ten times worse than I really was. With what purpose? Because you considered that I was an obstacle in your path to wealth and social advancement. You imagined that with me out of the way he would leave his money to you. When you found he wouldn't do that, you killed him!"

"It's a lie! It's a lie! You can't prove it!" shrieked the lawyer.

"The people of the State of New York will have no difficulty in proving the case against you. The evidence is overwhelming. To-morrow you will be

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arrested. Indictment and trial will speedily follow. Only when you are convicted and sentenced to death shall I consider my mission ended. I go from here to the office of the district attorney. Good day!"

Forrester turned to go, when Bryce suddenly intercepted him.

"Don't go—don't go!" he said tremulously. "Don't go. Have pity on me. I'll tell you everything."

"Tell me the truth—that's all I wish to know!" said Forrester sternly. "You killed him!"

"I didn't intend to," came the answer in a low tone from the cowering, miserable figure. Then incoherently, rapidly, he went on: "I asked him to let me have some more money. He refused. I got angry. One word led to another until he ordered me out of the house. Desperate, feeling that I had lost my best friend, hardly knowing what I was doing, I drew my revolver and fired twice. He fell. Then I was frightened. I did not know what to do. The safe was open, the money I wanted within reach. I took the currency and the bonds. The money went in Wall Street. The bonds have been in my possession ever since. I've been unable to sell them. To divert suspicion from myself, I worked up the case against you. It failed, and I have failed. I never profited a cent by the crime. Nothing but misfortune has followed me until I am what you see me to-day. That is all. And now—what will you do now?"

"I shall send you to the chair," answered Forrester coldly.

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"Have pity!" pleaded the wretched man.

"You deserve no pity. You had none on me. You shall confess your crime before the whole world. My reputation, my happiness and that of the woman whom I have asked to be my wife depends on my name being cleared of that fearful stain. You shall pay the penalty of your crime. Nothing on earth, not all the tears of all the angels in Heaven could turn me from my purpose to send you to the electric chair!"

But the lawyer was no longer paying attention to what Forrester was saying. His eyes were fixed on the locket and chain he was wearing. He noticed it casually at first, then some marked peculiarity in its workmanship caused him to inspect it more closely. He gazed on it, as if fascinated, becoming more and more interested, and his manner more and more excited. He looked from the locket to Forrester and from Forrester to the locket. Finally greatly agitated and pointing to the locket, he demanded:

"Where did you get that locket and chain?"

"What's that to you?" replied Forrester gruffly.

"I want to know. There is a reason—an important reason."

"The locket and chain," replied Forrester, "were on my neck when I was found as an infant. I was abandoned on John Forrester's doorstep by unknown parents."

"What?" ejaculated the lawyer. "You are not the son of John Forrester's sister? You were no blood relation of his?"

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"None whatever. He invented that fiction, thinking it would spare me the stigma of being nobody's child."

The lawyer had drawn closer to Forrester, and was looking up eagerly into his face.

"Do you know what year it was when you were found?"

"Yes," answered Forrester. "It was in 1875—exactly thirty-six years ago. It must have been in the summer time, for they told me I was scantily clad."

"1875!" muttered the lawyer. "In the summer time. That's the exact year. It was also the summer." Aloud he asked:

"Were there no marks on the clothing?"

"No," replied Forrester. "Only the initials F. B. on a scrap of paper."

"Do you mind taking off the locket and letting me see it?" asked Bryce, making a strong effort to control himself.

"Not at all," replied Forrester. "But I don't see how it interests you."

He took it off and handed it to the old man, who examined it with trembling fingers.

"It's the same—the same!" he muttered. Touching a spring the locket flew open, disclosing a woman's portrait.

"Hallo!" cried Forrester. "How did you do that? I had no idea that the locket could be opened in that way."

The old lawyer made no answer. He was looking

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fixedly at Forrester, as if trying to trace in the stern features of the man some likeness to a face of the past.

"Come, come," cried Forrester impatiently. "I've no time to lose. Give me the locket. I must be off. I've learned all I wanted to know."

He made a movement towards the door.

"Stop!" cried the old man. "Where are you going?"

"To the district attorney's office."

"What are you going there for?" asked Bryce tremulously.

"To give you up," replied Forrester relentlessly.

The lawyer suddenly started forward. Forrester braced himself, expecting an attack. But there was no fight left in the old man. His voice was trembling and his eyes were filled with tears.

"You will not give me up," he almost sobbed.

"I will—as sure as there's a God in Heaven!" replied Forrester pitilessly.

"I say you will not!" cried the lawyer.

There was something in his manner that made Forrester look at him in surprise. This was not the old Bryce, cunning, crafty, defiant. It was a broken down old man begging for his life.

"I will not?" echoed Forrester, astonished. "Why will I not?"

"Because—because I am your father!" cried the old man, extending his two arms.

Forrester fell back in amazement. The room seemed to swim round.

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"You my father!" he cried in bewilderment. "What new lie is this?"

"It is the truth. Here is the portrait of your poor mother. Her first name was Fanny.

"Fanny!" echoed Forrester. "That is the initial on the paper—F. B."

"Yes—Fanny Bryce—that was her name. The locket and chain I myself gave her on our wedding day. Poor woman! My cursed temper drove her from the home. She went away, taking you with her. A few days later they found her body in New York. I could never find a trace of what she did with you." Breaking down, he cried: "You are my son! My son!"

Forrester snatched the locket out of the old man's hand, and hastening to the window looked closely at the portrait in the stronger light. He saw the face of a beautiful young woman, dressed in the fashion of the early seventies.

Turning to Bryce, his voice choked with emotion, he asked:

"Is this my mother?"

"Yes—yes," answered the old man. "You look like her. I see it now—I see it now."

"My mother—my poor martyred mother!"

Forrester pressed the miniature reverently to his lips. This, then, was the end of his quest! Success and yet failure! He had tracked the murderer to his lair, only to find he was his own father! He laughed bitterly as he realized the irony of it. What a situa-

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tion! His brain reeled as he tried to cope with it. What could be done now? He could not send his own father to the electric chair. That was very clear. Criminal, degraded, base as he was, he was still his own father. Yet what of himself? The identity of the real culprit must remain forever a secret, the world must never know the truth. He could not clear his own name at the terrible price of his father's life. No, his duty was plain. There was a sacrifice to be made, and he must make it. He must leave this old man free to go his way, he must even provide for his support. No one must know, not even the woman he loved, for whose sake he had started out to clear up the mystery. It was solved now, yet the world must go on accusing him, and Virginia herself would end by believing him guilty. He could never convince her to the contrary. He must be silent forever. Is not silence often interpreted as proof of guilt? She would judge him like all the rest. He would simply tell her that he had failed. He would say that he could never hope now to clear his name, and they would part forever.

Trying to master his emotion, he turned to the poor trembling creature who still cowered before him.

"I have heard enough," he said hoarsely. "This is my last punishment. All my life I have sought for my father and mother. I wondered who they were and why they abandoned me. At last, after all these years, I find you—a self-confessed murderer—twice a murderer, for you murdered my mother too. We

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have met after all these years! Joyful meeting between father and son, isn't it?" He laughed mockingly, and then went on fiercely: "But to-day, this moment, we part forever. You understand that after what has occurred we must be as strangers. I can't give you up to justice, I can't send my own father to his death. You escape the penalty of your crime. You are free to live your life out wherever you see fit. I will not molest you, but I never want to look upon your face again. I will provide you with a decent livelihood, but only on two conditions—that you make complete restitution of the stolen bonds and that you keep out of my sight for the rest of your life."

"Yes—yes—I'll give you the bonds," said the lawyer in a whisper, as if still afraid someone might overhear. Pointing to the bedstead, he added: "They are there—sewn in the mattress—\$150,000 of them! Am I safe?"

"Yes, you are safe," replied Forrester bitterly. "You have nothing to fear from me."

This assurance that he would escape paying the penalty of his crime, the sudden knowledge that all his anxiety and privations of the past two years were at an end, proved too much for the old lawyer. His pent-up emotion gave way, and breaking down, he buried his face on his arm with a sob.

Forrester stood over him, with an expression on his face half contemptuous, half pitying.

"You gave me my life," cried Forrester. "I will give you yours. God knows you don't deserve to live."

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You have brought nothing but misery on all with whom you've come in contact. Your hands are stained with the blood of an inoffensive fellow creature. Yet, because you are my father, I may not denounce you. I sacrifice myself for your sake. That you may understand how great is the sacrifice I make, I will tell you this much. I love a good woman. On my marriage to her depends my future happiness and welfare. She naturally recoils from linking her future with a man who is suspected of a terrible crime, no matter how innocent she may believe him, no matter how she may love him. I took a solemn oath I would find the man whose cross I was bearing, so that I might shift the burden to his shoulders. Accidentally I learned that you had offered one of the bonds in Chicago. I traced you in New York, and by chance I saw you in Marks's office. I accomplished my purpose, and yet I've failed. I can't go back and tell her I've found the real murderer and that he is my own father. Rather than that I prefer to be silent, and I will end my life as I began it—alone. Do you understand?"

The lawyer made no reply. His head was still bowed on his arm. Forrester went on:

"As I told you, I will provide for you. I shall allow you a yearly income of \$3,000. Will that suffice for your needs?"

Still Bryce remained silent. He made no move. He did not appear to have heard. Forrester raised his voice.

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"Don't you hear what I proposed? Please pay attention to what I am saying. I've no time to waste."

Still no reply. Suddenly Forrester sprang forward and lifted the lawyer's arm. It was limp. The hands were cold, the eyes were closed, the face ashy white. Thinking he had fainted, Forrester quickly opened the window and tried to arouse him. Then he listened to his heart. It seemed to have stopped beating?

"He's dying!" he cried.

Wishing to summon assistance, he ran to the door, and as he opened it a woman entered. It was Virginia.

"You here!" he exclaimed starting back, unable to believe the evidence of his own eyes. At first he was so bewildered that he thought he must be dreaming, he believed her to be a figment of his excited brain. Then she spoke, and only then, when he heard the familiar sound of her voice, he was convinced that the woman he loved really stood before him. She extended her hand in greeting, and, his pulse throbbing furiously, he grasped it firmly in his, unwilling to let go, as if afraid that she was an apparition after all and would presently disappear.

"I came to bring Mr. Bryce poor Vivie's things," she explained. "They are in the cab downstairs. I heard voices and was afraid to come in. Then you called out." Advancing softly into the room, she asked: "Is he ill?"

"He's unconscious—it's a seizure of some sort. I'll send for a doctor," replied Forrester hastily. Going to the landing, he called over the banisters: "Patsey—quick—get a doctor! Mr. Bryce is ill!"

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There was a sound of scurrying feet and the front door downstairs banged.

Virginia, meantime, had approached the table, and was bending over the lawyer's still, shrunken form. Her fingers were on his pulse.

"It's the heart," she said gravely. "He always dreaded these attacks. We can do nothing until the doctor comes." Then glancing shyly at Forrester, she added gently: "I hardly expected to find you here."

Forrester looked down at her. His face was pale and grave, but he smiled faintly as he answered slowly:

"I did not expect to see you here or anywhere until my work was done."

"What work?" she demanded.

"The redemption of my character—my rehabilitation before the world—the wiping out of the stain. Was that not the bargain we made in Paris?"

"Yes," she murmured. There was a moment's silence, and then she asked: "Have you succeeded?"

He shook his head. Averting his eyes, he answered:

"No—it is impossible. Too much time has been lost. The trail is cold. I have abandoned all hope of clearing up the mystery. We shall never know who killed John Forrester. I'm convinced of that now. The world believes I killed him. Let it continue to think so. From this moment I will not stir a finger to find the man who was really guilty of that crime. You were right. I see it now."

"See what now?" demanded Virginia. A covert smile was on her lips and a new light shone in her eyes as she closely watched him.

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"I realize," said Forrester gravely, "that unhappiness would certainly come of our union. You might believe me innocent, you might be willing to marry me in spite of the world's injustice, yet until the mystery were completely cleared up there might lurk deep in your heart a little distrust of me. You might fear sometimes that you had given yourself to a murderer. I should see that distrust, that fear of me in your eyes, and it would break my heart. No, let us part now. It is easier for us both. I will go my way—you yours. I release you from your word—only I wish to God we had never met! Then I should have nothing to regret."

"You release me?"

"Yes, I release you."

"Yet I promised to be your wife."

"I give you back your word."

"But suppose I refuse?"

"Refuse?" echoed Forrester, not understanding.
"What do you mean?"

"Suppose I insist on holding you to your word. You promised to return to me when you had accomplished what you set out to do, did you not?"

"Yes, but I've miserably failed. Don't you see that?"

Suddenly Virginia came closer and grasped his two hands.

"No, Robert," she said softly, "I can't see it, for I know you've succeeded only too well. Why should both our lives be wrecked for another's sin? You have

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not told me the truth. I overheard everything. You were willing to make a noble sacrifice. I refuse to permit it."

With a wild cry of joy Forrester clasped her to his breast.

"Virginia—my beloved!"

Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and the doctor entered. He bent over the lawyer's motionless figure and made a hasty examination. Then raising his hand, he said gravely:

"He's dead!"

Forrester remained motionless, unmoved. There was intense silence in the room. Virginia slipped her hand in his and whispered:

"God ordains all for the best, dear."

Forrester silently folded her in his arms and kissed her.

FINIS.



